

NEGOTIATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS:
LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM ON LANGKAWI ISLAND,
MALAYSIA

BY

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IN MEMORY OF

Hj. Selamat Bin Hj. Mokti
(1920 – 1999)

DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the degree of PhD, Social Anthropology, at the University of Edinburgh 2001. It was composed by me and is wholly my own work.

ABSTRACT

Negotiations and Contradictions: Local Perceptions of Tourism on Langkawi Island, Malaysia

This thesis examines the impact of tourism development on Langkawi island. It explores the way in which the people of Langkawi have developed several strategies to deal with the various changes brought by tourism development. I suggest that tourism has been viewed as a 'gateway' for the development of Langkawi and has become a catalyst for the arrival of modernity in this local setting.

This thesis primarily discusses how Langkawi people have dealt with the demands of the tourist industry, confronting modernity and mass consumption, negotiating their 'old' values/perception to absorb new values. It also shows the increase in distinction not only between outsiders and insiders but also among villagers in the local community, and the formation of the middle class. This process of negotiation was inevitable for them not only to fulfil their aspirations to become *moden* but also to fit in with the local tourist industry. I describe how the islanders have shown their eagerness to become *moden* but at the same time have made great efforts to maintain their identity as village people and as Muslims. Exploring their everyday experiences gives a deeper understanding of how tourism, either directly or indirectly, has impacted on their lives and how this has influenced their perception of tourism development.

The different strategies adopted by local people show that they should not be seen as passive but as capable of accepting tourism and setting appropriate boundaries for their involvement with it. This exploration of their everyday lives contributes to the ongoing debates on the changes that tourism brings in the host country. I use tourism as a tool to address anthropological issues concerning modernity, consumption and changes in attitude, which contribute to a different 'platform of thinking' in the anthropology of tourism.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of abbreviations used in the thesis:

JKKK	<i>Jawatankuasa Kemajuan Kampung</i>
KEDA	Kedah Regional Development Authority
LADA	Langkawi Development Authority
LIMA	Langkawi International Maritime
LSP	Langkawi Structural Plan
MADA	Muda Agricultural Development Authority
MARA	<i>Majlis Amanah Rakyat</i> (Council of the Peoples' trust), the leading government statutory body for promoting Malay economic interests.
NEP	New Economic Policy
OKB	<i>Orang Kaya Baru</i> (Nouveau Riche)
PAS	Parti Se-Islam Malaysia or Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party
TDC	Tourist Development Corporation
TOL	Temporary Occupation License
UMNO	United Malay National Organization
WI	Women's Institute

GLOSSARY OF MALAY TERMS

This is a short glossary of some of the Malay terms that I have used in the text.

<i>Anak angkat</i>	foster child
<i>Arak</i>	alcoholic drink
<i>Banyak duit</i>	having a lot of money
<i>Berkat</i>	god's blessing
<i>Duit</i>	money
<i>Gotong royong</i>	communal labour
<i>Halal</i>	items that are religiously permissible for consumption
<i>Haram</i>	religiously forbidden and sinful, for example, drinking alcohol
<i>Imam</i>	prayer leader
<i>Iman</i>	faith
<i>Kampung</i>	village
<i>Kaya</i>	rich
<i>Kerja sendiri</i>	self-employed
<i>Makan gaji</i>	to work for a salary
<i>Maksiat</i>	the act of breaking God's laws
<i>Mukim</i>	district
<i>Malu</i>	the concept of shame; also being shy
<i>Nafsu</i>	desire/passion
<i>Orang Islam</i>	Muslims
<i>Orang kampung</i>	village people
<i>Pandai jaga diri</i>	taking care of oneself properly
<i>Pangkin</i>	veranda
<i>Rezeki</i>	divine economic lot
<i>Usahawan</i>	entrepreneurs

NOTE ON CURRENCY

RM refers to the Malaysian Ringgit. During the time fieldwork was carried out (Nov 1997 – Nov 1998), the value of the Ringgit in foreign exchange declined phenomenally due to the economic crisis in South East-Asia. The Ringgit depreciated in value, beginning at RM 4 to the pound sterling, falling to RM 8, and it finally stabilised at RM 6.3.

Map 1: Malaysia



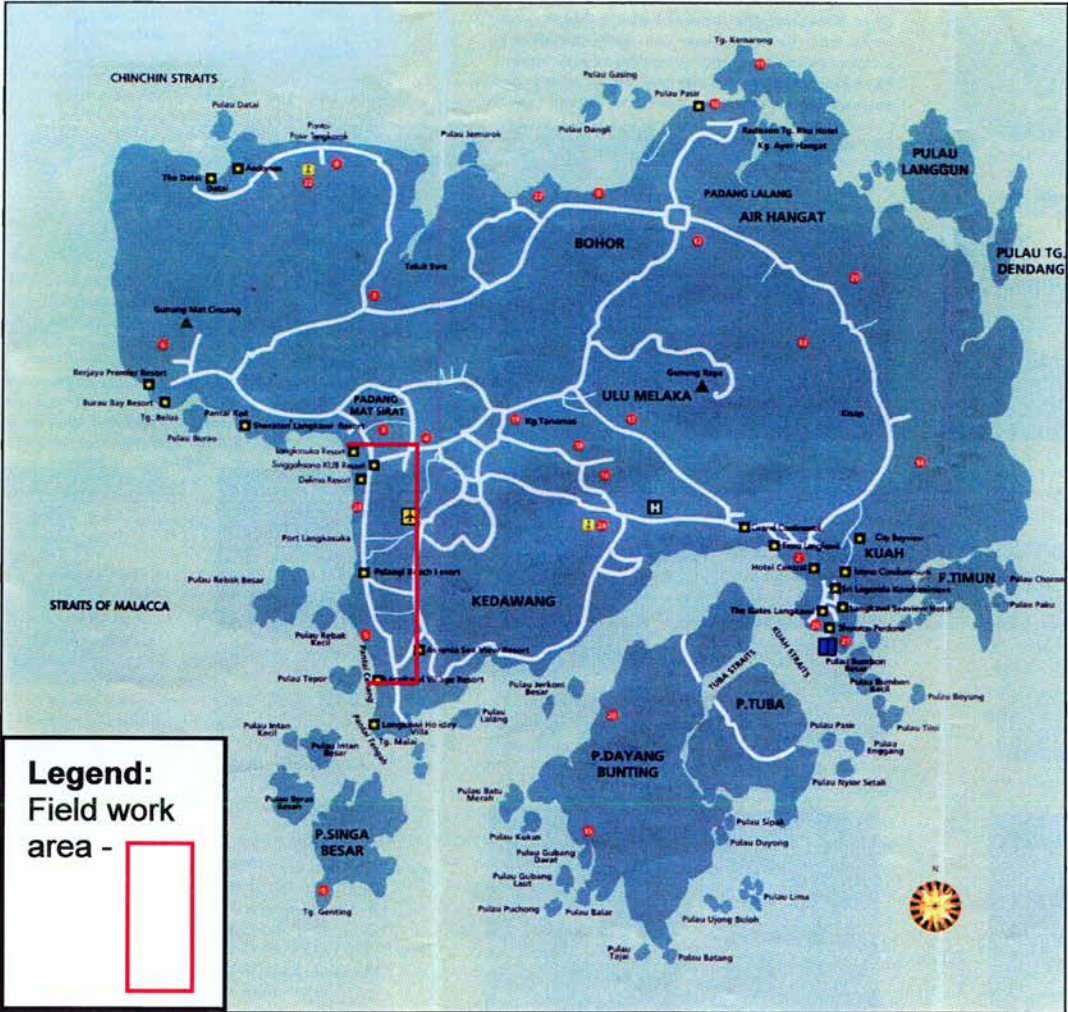
(Source: This map has been copied and adapted from tourist brochure, "Langkawi, Malaysia." Published by Tourism Malaysia, Ministry of Culture, Arts & Tourism (LGK(E) 10/97).

Map 2: Kedah State



(Source: Map 2 and 3 have been copied and adapted from tourist brochure, "Kedah Darulaman not far from your dream." Published by Kedah, Culture, Art & Tourism Unit, Malaysia (MKG12/97).

Map 3: Langkawi Island



INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the social impact of tourism development and the local people's perception of it on Langkawi Island, Kedah, a state in northern Malaysia. It explores the way in which the people of Langkawi have developed several strategies to negotiate the various changes brought by tourism development. I argue that tourism development on Langkawi Island is a 'mixed blessing' to local people and that they have viewed it as a gateway to the modernisation of the island.

This thesis therefore primarily discusses how local people have dealt with the demands of the tourist industry, confronting modernity and negotiating their values as both Muslims (*orang Islam*) and village people (*orang kampung*) in order to adapt themselves to their new environment. This process of negotiation seems to have been inevitable for they are eager not only to fulfil their aspirations to become 'modern' but also to be part of the local tourist industry. The increase in self-consciousness, particularly among new local entrepreneurs, has helped in maintaining their local values. It can be said here that tourism, which has encouraged the arrival of modernity in the island, has provided a locus for local people to debate and negotiate their values and so distinguish between the 'insider' and the 'outsider.' This thesis therefore examines tourism at a particular moment in the modernisation of Langkawi when local identities were being contested and negotiated.

In this introduction I begin by explaining the aim of my thesis and then provide an overview of the literature on the anthropology of tourism. This is followed by a discussion of the history of tourism in Malaysia in relation to the modernization of Langkawi and the development of tourism there. The discussion is then devoted to describing Langkawi Island as the field site of my research. After a brief discussion of

the village where I stayed, I turn to strategies, methods and the dilemmas of fieldwork. The final section of this introduction deals with several themes, which run throughout this thesis, uniting all the chapters. The main issues of each chapter will be discussed thematically later in this section, including land, consumption, modernity and class formation.

Anthropology of Tourism

My analysis of the social impact of tourism on Langkawi Island follows the debate in the anthropology of tourism, which began in the 1970s. In anthropology, tourism is seen as a cultural phenomenon. Tourism has been a subject of anthropological inquiry because it comprises travel and cultural contact between tourists and the people in the host countries, referred to as the host and guest relationship. The first edition of *Host and Guest: Anthropology of Tourism*, edited by Valene Smith and published in 1977, was the beginning of the legitimisation of tourism study in anthropology. Since then much research has been undertaken and numerous articles published in journals such as *Annals of Tourism Research*.

In the anthropology of tourism, the discussion can be divided into four different 'platforms' of thinking, as explained by Jafari (1991). The first is the 'advocacy platform', which describes the early view of tourism development and promotion. The second is the 'cautionary platform', which warns against the consequences of tourism. The 'adaptacy platform', which looks at alternative forms of tourism, is in the third category, and the fourth category is the 'knowledge-based' platform, which is in search of a deeper understanding of tourism. It is to this last platform of thinking that my thesis is most closely related.

Numerous studies have been made of the costs and benefits of tourism to local people. Economists have analysed tourism's contribution to development and have applied a wide range of theories to describe its benefits. It is generally conceded that tourism can be a positive influence on economic development. De Kadt (1976) in *Tourism: Passport to Development* debates the merits and shortcomings of the assertion that tourism can be a passport to development. He argues that the cost - benefit analysis might be misleading if it is measured without taking into consideration the qualitative assessment of the social cost (see also Young 1973).

The discussion of tourism in anthropology has focused largely on the impact of social and cultural changes, which have created the commodification of culture (Greenwood 1972; Smith 1989). This is the way in which objects and activities or local culture are assessed primarily in terms of their exchange value (Gewertz 1991; Stymiest 1996). Others argue that tourism is just a form of imperialism or neo-colonialism, particularly in Third World countries (Nash 1989; Palmer 1994).¹ Writers such as Milman & Pizam (1988) contend that tourism's legacy is often physical damage to the environment and social conditions that lead to serious problems in the host society. The debates on tourism and its impact on culture have focused largely on the question of whether or not the culture is 'destroyed, spoiled, commoditised, strengthened, revitalised' and so on. This is clear in most of the essays in *Host and Guest: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Thus, it is not surprising that the editor concluded: "It appears that the existent forms of tourism tend overall to be more negative than positive in impact, but this is not irremediable" (Smith 1978: 14). This kind of analysis of the cultural consequences of international tourism seems to pose this issue in unfruitful ways (Wood 1979, 1993).

¹ This theory refers to the expansion of a society's interests abroad. These interests may be economic, political, military, religious etc. (Nash 1989).

Recently, literature on tourism has moved from stressing its social benefits and costs to a contemporary emphasis on how tourism inevitably carries with it both social benefits and costs which can be managed mostly by public policy. Tourism is presented as a catalyst for cultural exchange, understanding, appreciation and respect. Cohen (1988), for example, argues that tourism, instead of destroying, can be a means of preserving local arts and crafts. It is argued that the production of art for tourism has heightened self-identity and self-value, and that local people are more aware of their local culture. The recent work on tourism has gradually recognised that it has both good and bad sides and has tried to reach a more balanced view of the impact of tourism (Smith & Nash 1991; Brunt & Courtney 1999).

However, there has been little attempt to examine the consequences of tourism development in Malaysian culture and society (King 1993). Researchers from other disciplines such as economics and geography have produced much of the relevant literature. Even where such studies exist, most of them have generally focused on whether tourism has had a negative or positive effect on local cultures, and often conclude that tourism is bad or good for that particular community (Hong 1985). The approach has been to view 'local culture' as a homogeneous entity, which suffers an impact by tourism. Bella Bird's argument based on her analysis of the impact of tourism on Langkawi Island, that tourism "is acknowledged by anthropologists as having a particularly disruptive influence on vulnerable traditional societies" (1989: 4) needs further investigation. The fact that the tourism industry is highly visual has often made it the scapegoat for socio-cultural change (Crick 1989).

My thesis describes the balanced effect of tourism on Langkawi. Throughout my fieldwork, the people of Langkawi never asserted that tourism development *was* the sole source of 'cultural destruction' or the marginalization of local people. They realised how

tourism opened up development on Langkawi, although local people found its pace rather too rapid. However, instead of blaming solely the tourism industry, they argued that the local authorities and they themselves as Muslims were also partly responsible. This positive attitude towards tourism development is manifested by the counterfactual effect, an approach to the problem of analysing causation, which employs the subjunctive conditional. It is a plausible, though hypothetical, scenario to see how things would have been without tourism development. Using this counterfactual scenario, Langkawi people agree that Langkawi would not have been developed, had there not been tourism development.

In this thesis, one of my aims is to enhance our understanding of how a Malay Muslim community is coping with through the process of negotiation in its local setting and how this has influenced its view of tourism development. It is revealed that in the anthropology of tourism, numerous studies have been made of local perception and the social and cultural impact of tourism. However, the relationship between religious belief and the local perception of tourism is much less documented, for most of the academic literature evaluates it only at a more general level. Many studies make passing reference to the importance of religious belief but cast little light on how this has influenced local people to develop coping strategies with tourists and tourism development. Dogan (1989) point outs that local people in the host population are expected to adjust their lives in several ways to cope not only with tourists but also with the development itself. As acknowledged by Din (1989*b*), Islam has a significant effect on the host community's perception of tourism development. Aziz (1995) argues that conflict has often arisen, not because of tourism *per se*, but rather because of the choice, implementation and enforcement of tourism development policies. I suggest that religious belief and local practices should be explored to determine the local people's perception of tourism and their behaviour towards tourists. Unless this is done, it may not be possible to identify the

real significance of any change, particularly in a Muslim society where Islam is closely integrated in its culture.

It has been argued that the different practices and interpretations of Islam among Muslim communities, particularly in Southeast Asia are based on local traditions (Nagata 1974; Hooker 1983; Ellen 1983; Bowen 1993). In a study of social changes and perception of tourism, it is important to acknowledge this different practices and interpretations of Islam. It has been argued that tourism in Southeast Asia cannot be isolated from many aspects of its 'traditional' culture (Sanger 1993, for example). Hitchcock (1993) has argued that that fact is often overlooked in tourism studies of that region. A comparative analysis of Langkawi Island will therefore shed light on an important discussion in the anthropology of tourism and also help us better understand some of the contrasts between Muslim communities in Malaysia and those in other parts of the world.

The fact that the majority of Langkawi people are Muslim is important, for their religious belief influences their response to tourism development. I argue that the local identity and values of the islanders as both 'village people' and Muslims have had a significant impact on negotiation, and this has been illustrated in their everyday lives. During this process of negotiation, they have discussed the morality of new values and the role of the government with constant reference to their identity as Muslim and village people. An analysis of their daily lives gives a deeper understanding of the direct and indirect impact of tourism and its influence on their perception of tourism development in general. Shuib & Shiraj (1989), who researched briefly local people's perception of the impact of tourism on Langkawi, argue that knowledge of the residents' perceptions can help in identifying the type, quality and scope of tourism projects. This thesis analyses

the role of local practices and values in everyday life and its relationship – all of which have become central concerns in anthropology.

Malaysia and Langkawi: A Brief History of Tourism

In the International Tourism Report 1994, Malaysia was regarded as one of the world's 'best kept tourism secrets', for it was an ideal tourist destination offering a vast range of attractions.² Malaysia's major strength, the mixture of ethnic groups, languages, dialects and religions, gives the country an enormously diverse culture as reflected in its festivals, food and general way of life. Tourism has a long history in Southeast Asia, particularly in Bali and Java, where it has existed since the 1930s. Part of the fascination of Southeast Asia as a region of study is its enormous diversity and complexity in language, ecology, ethnic groups, culture and religion (Hitchcock 1993).

Tourism in Malaysia is a relatively new industry which has not been given due attention until fairly recently. The Malaysian government began to take a serious interest in it when the Tourist Development Corporation (TDC) was established on 10 August 1972. Prior to this, tourism was under the management of the Department of Industry, Commerce and Tourism. Since this sector did not contribute much to the economy, the government gave it less attention than the main commodity export. In the early 1980s, the world economic recession forced the government to think of developing tourism as an alternative for generating foreign exchange. The government's efforts in this area were shown by the establishment of the Department of Arts and Tourism in May 1987, whose aim was to make suggestions, draw up plans and monitor tourism activities. In 1990, it was renamed the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism and its objective was to encourage the industry.

² International Tourism Report 1994.

Tourism creates a high level of employment in the services sector, notably hotels and restaurants, public transport and personal services. In the hotel and restaurant sectors almost 61,000 workers are directly and indirectly associated with tourism (Abdul Aziz 1993). It has been earmarked to play an important role in the development of Malaysian economy, stimulated by a wide range of incentives. The government has actively promoted both domestic and international tourism since the early 1970s. The concerted effort to 'sell' Malaysia was made during the 'Malaysia Fest' 87, which marked the beginning of a massive promotion to put Malaysia on the map as a tourist destination. The declaration of duty-free ports such as those on Langkawi and Bukit Kayu Hitam, and the biggest celebration – the 'Visit Malaysia Year 1990' – were part of the government's strategy to promote Malaysian tourism. Nearly \$92 million was invested in the Visit Malaysia Year, comprising 123 events (Abdul Razak 1990).

The marked increase in the number of tourists from 4.8 million in 1989 to 7.5 million in 1990 (54.3 per cent) and in the corresponding tourist revenues of \$2.8 billion to \$4.5 billion (59.6 per cent) can be attributed to the Visit Malaysia Year campaign (Salleh 1992: 3). As a result, the tourism industry has become the third highest producer of foreign exchange after manufactured goods and petroleum. "For the first time, the country became a net foreign exchange earner in terms of a travel account surplus of \$45 million in the balance of payments."³ In 1997, Malaysia received 5.2 million tourists from the ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam). Singapore provides most visitors with 4.1 million, followed by Thailand with 560,774, tourists and 947,822 from Eastern Asia (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea).⁴

³ Annual Tourism Statistical Report 1990/1991, pg. 7

⁴ Malaysian Tourism Statistic Update 1992, pg. 3

Based on Smith's typology of tourism (1978), from cultural tourism, to ethnic, historical, environmental and recreational tourism, the Malaysian scene offers them all. The native populations in East Malaysia, such as the Iban of Sarawak, for example, represent ethnic tourism, while the Malaysian tropical rainforest and its national park offer environmental and recreational tourism. Heritage buildings, such as the ex-colonial buildings in Penang and Malacca, have been repackaged as part of Malaysian culture for historical tourism. However, cultural tourism is prominent in Malaysia, and is characterised by the tourists' general desire for 'local colour, festivals and costumes.'

As a tourist destination, Langkawi is famous for its beaches and islands. In particular, it can offer 'recreational tourism', in which the tourist can enjoy 'sun, sand and sea' for relaxation, or adventurous activities such as snorkelling, jet-skiing and hopping to the nearest islands. Since Langkawi is sunny, hot and humid all year round with temperatures ranging from 21 to 35 C, it has benefited most from this particular type of tourism, since most of the investment by the Malaysian government over the past ten years has been in beach resorts (ITR 1994). Many of the tourists whom I met, particularly those from abroad, told me that they came to Langkawi to enjoy some kind of 'privacy, relaxation and to have adventurous trips' to the nearest islands. This image of Langkawi as a 'gateway from city hustle and bustle' can be seen in the Premier Holiday's brochure, *Asia*, which has depicted Langkawi as

In a world where time seems to stand still...the hotel is situated beside a glorious sandy beach in 28 acres of lush tropical gardens. Designed like a traditional Malay village, the resort will appeal to those seeking an original and authentic location with deluxe facilities. Due to limited accessibility, Langkawi is still, thankfully, un-commercialised and reflects a true picture of Malaysia.

(cited in Selwyn 1993: 135)

Although other districts in Kedah have various tourist attractions, Langkawi district brings the highest revenue in tourist receipts. In 1995, about 1.85 million tourists visited the island (an increase of 250,000 from the previous year). It was asserted that 2.5 million tourists visited various locations in Kedah in 1997 compared with 1.9 million in 1996.⁵ Tourism receipts were RM 1.13 billion in 1996 and out of that, 73 per cent (RM 821.1 million) was contributed by tourists who visited Langkawi Island. It was reported that 2 million tourists arrive in Langkawi each year (Tenku Idris 1996). In Malaysia, Langkawi is among the places most frequented by foreign visitors, together with Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Petaling Jaya, Malacca and the Genting Highlands.⁶ Among the three island resorts in Malaysia, Langkawi recorded 1.8 million hotel guests, the highest in comparison with Pangkor Island (294,621) and Tioman Island (138,189). In late 1991, a 264-room Sheraton hotel and a 1,500 - room Delima Resort opened, followed by the 258 - room Langkawi Holiday Villa in early 1992. The peak months for foreign tourists were March, August and December, whereas October was the lowest month. For domestic tourists, the peak months were August and December whereas January was the lowest month.

Various annual events have been held on Langkawi to attract foreign tourists to the island. Among these events are the Langkawi International Maritime, Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA), the Tour de Langkawi and the International Dialogue. The latest major event was the Commonwealth Sea Games in 1998 in which Langkawi became the host for shooting events. Today the development of Malaysia's own internet through the JARING system, which links the country to the rest of the world, has placed Langkawi in cyber- space. Now, detailed information on Langkawi can be accessed via the Langkawi

⁵ *Berita Harian*, 17 February 1998.

⁶ Survey in *Highlights on Hotel Occupancy Survey 1997*. Malaysia: TDC 1998.

homepage.⁷ During my fieldwork, there were two computer shops run by local people providing Internet services for customers and computer lessons for young Langkawi people.

The Location of Langkawi Island

Malaysia is situated in the heart of Southeast Asia and is divided into two distinct regions: Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia extends from the Thai border down to the island of Singapore. East Malaysia, separated from the Peninsula by the South China Sea, comprises Sabah and Sarawak. Langkawi Island is located about 30 miles off the coast of Kedah, and is separated from the mainland by the Straits of Malacca. As one of its eleven districts, Langkawi is under the administration of the state of Kedah.⁸ Langkawi is an archipelago comprising 104 islands, of which Langkawi is the largest with a total area of 32,180 hectares. Only four islands are inhabited: Tuba, Singa, Pregnant Maiden, and Langkawi. There are about 100 families on Pulau Tuba, located about 5 - 10 minutes by boat from Langkawi Island. In 1991, the population of Langkawi reached 42,755 of which 89 per cent are Malays, 8 per cent Chinese, and 3 per cent are of various descents (Tenku Idris 1996: 96).

References to Langkawi Island go as far back as the fifteenth century, with the name Lung-Ya-Kiau-Yi appearing on charts strongly believed to have been used by Admiral Cheng Ho, the envoy from China, when he visited Malacca in 1405.⁹ According to Suwannathat-Pian (1989), the oldest written source of information about Langkawi is

⁷ This homepage provides the user with a range of information from the history of Langkawi, how to travel there, the tourist sites, facilities, and map of Langkawi, to the latest news on Langkawi (<http://www.Langkawionline.com.my>).

⁸ Kedah is one of the eleven states in Peninsular Malaysia.

⁹ *Mystery Caves of Langkawi, Malaysia 1994*. Dept. of Irrigation and Drainage, Ministry of Agriculture and Design Dimension Sdn. Bhd. p. 14

in the *L'Histoire General des Voyages* XXXIV, which recorded that 'Lancachui' island was a famous destination for traders in the region. Langkawi was the main exporter of *lada* (chillies) and was called Lada Island. Ironically, the name is similar to LADA (Langkawi Development Authority), which plays an important role in the development of Langkawi today.

The Frenchman, General Augustin de Beaulieu (who was in the service of King Louis XIV of France) stopped at Langkawi, which was then called Lancahui, on 7 August, 1621 to trade cannon for pepper with the "King of Queda" (Harris 1764: 246). He described the island as then being well known for pepper.

Chillies grew in abundance at the foot of the mountain. The soil is very fertile in fruits, rice and livestock; several rivers providing sources of excellent water and large forests can be seen.

(cited in Ismail 1996: 3)

He wrote that there were about a hundred people on Langkawi, which would increase to 700 during the chilli harvest. According to Crawford, during the early nineteenth century, Langkawi Island was inhabited by Malays and had an advanced economy, exporting agricultural products to Kedah and Penang (Crawford 1987).

In 1821 - 22, the Siamese invaded Kedah when they asserted that the Sultan of Kedah had been making overtures to Burma, and they forced him to flee to Penang. After that Langkawi became an abandoned land. Many of its inhabitants died or were captured and sent to Siam to begin a new life. In 1850, ravaged by the effects of the Siamese occupation, Kedah was a depopulated land (Gullick 1987). An English editor of the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, who visited Kedah in 1851, stated that Kedah was almost empty of people and estimated about 8,000 inhabitants.

In 1891, Raja Chulalongkorn from Siam visited Peninsular Malaya and wrote that Langkawi had recovered from the Siamese attack. The local economy had also increased to the level where the islanders exported rattan, fish and wood to Kedah and Penang, and their agricultural products changed from chillies to paddy and coconut. Kedah managed to preserve the substance of its independence until financial chaos led to a European adviser being appointed by the Siamese in 1905 who then allowed a transfer to British control in 1909 (Gullick 1987).

In the early twentieth century, the absence of development on Langkawi island is argued to be related to the global economic recession which occurred in the late 1920s and 1930s (Subwannathat-Pian 1989), although most Langkawi people seem to attribute it to the effect of Mahsuri's curse.¹⁰ It is said that Langkawi was among the poorest districts in Kedah. Historically, Langkawi people have been very mobile with a high level of migration. Carsten (1997) argues that the main motive for migration has been economic as well as quarrels with kin, fighting or warfare. In Kedah, peasant cultivators had to pay a land rent or be liable for compulsory service (*sistem Kerah*) (Gullick 1987). The holder of revenues of a *mukim* (district) received money from the *kerah* service by selling the peasant's labour to whoever might be willing to buy it (ibid. 85). As a result of this, many peasant cultivators migrated to other states and to Langkawi Island to avoid the *kerah* service. Langkawi was perceived as a place to look for food (*cari makan*), to open up land (*buka tanah*) or to find work (*cari kerja*) (Carsten 1997: 265).

The population on Langkawi has increased from 16,617 (2.3 per cent of the whole population in Kedah state) in 1957, to 23,819 (2.5 per cent) and 29,084 (2.5 per cent) in

¹⁰ The Mahsuri legend, which was asserted to be one of the famous Langkawi legends, was about a beautiful woman named Mahsuri who was married to the son of the ruler of Langkawi Island. It was told that her beauty had become well-known to local people and she became the victim of hatred and jealousy of her own mother-in-law. It was told that she was sentenced to death, accused of committing adultery with a trader (Tenku Idris 1996).

1970 and 1980 respectively (Zaharah 1982). Although the population seems to be increasing, it also shows the emigration of Langkawi people to other districts or states for better job prospects. However, since the declaration of the island as a duty-free port in 1987, Langkawi has developed rapidly and thus encouraged the immigration of people not only from other states or provinces but also from neighbouring countries such as Thailand and the Philippines. In the past, the young and educated people from Langkawi had traditionally migrated to the mainland in search of better job prospects. With evidence of increasing job opportunities now at home, many people are being lured back to the island.

The Social Demography of Langkawi Island

I conducted twelve months' research on the island of Langkawi, Malaysia from November 1997 to October 1998. I had visited Langkawi as a tourist when I was young, and in 1992 I returned to the island to do my undergraduate research. At that time, I was carrying out a community project organised by the university where I was studying as part of its annual programme. My task was to research the impact of hotel development on the local chalet entrepreneurship. The curiosity to see how tourism had changed Langkawi people brought me back to island for my doctoral research.

Several factors influenced my choice of Langkawi Island for my fieldwork site. Firstly, the combination of its historical, geographical and socio-economic development made it a unique place for my research. The island is also a good example of an area undergoing rapid development in its economy and social infrastructure via the introduction of tourism. There is a stark contrast between the Langkawi of today and the Langkawi of early 1980s. As was reported in a local newspaper, "Ten years after obtaining duty-free status, Langkawi has become one of the fastest-growing districts in

Malaysia.”¹¹ These ten years were an appropriate period in which to investigate the impact of tourism development in the island. Substantial research has been done into the impact of tourism on local populations in host countries (Young 1973; Smith 1989; De Kadt 1976; Hitchcock 1993). However, each area has its own history of tourism development and this should be studied specifically.

The first time that I met my first foster family was on the day when I arrived on Langkawi for my fieldwork. Meeting them was actually by accident, or I should say my luck, for I was introduced to them by a couple from Kuala Lumpur whom I had met on the ferry to the island. The couple, who were in their late forties, told me that they usually took a trip to Langkawi every three months to visit their close friend, whom was considered part of the family. The wife, whom I called Cik Na asked me my purpose in going to Langkawi. Without any hesitation I explained my research project and that I needed a foster family to stay with. I was quite surprised when she suggested that I accompany her to her friend's house.

I was quite relieved to know that at least I had accommodation, especially since I had had to arrive at Kuah Jetty very early in the morning. Kuah Jetty is the main landing stage for visitors coming by ferry from either Kuala Perlis jetty or Kuala Kedah jetty. These two jetties, Kuala Perlis and Kuala Kedah, are the main embarkation points on the mainland to cross to Langkawi. The journey takes about 45 minutes (30 miles) from Kuala Perlis, and about half an hour (53 miles) from Kuala Kedah. There are five ferry companies operating from Kuala Perlis Jetty and Kuala Kedah. Kuah jetty has recently been given a facelift as part of the promotion of tourism. At the approach to the new Kuah jetty is a large, eye-catching signboard: 'Welcome to Pulau Langkawi, a Duty-Free

¹¹ *The Star*, 12 July 1997.

Island.’ To the right of the jetty, where several foreign yachts are moored, is an exclusive international club for sailors, charging an annual fee of RM 10,000.

On arriving at Kuah Jetty for the first time after five years of absence, I and the other visitors from Kuala Lumpur were greeted by a group of local men in smart suits, white shirts and black trousers, each with a mobile phone in one hand and business cards in the other. These men were working either independently or for the car rental agencies or small tourist companies offering various facilities and activities such as island excursions, boat fishing trips etc. The men, while busy distributing their business cards to us, were asking whether we already had transport or were persuading us to hire their rental cars. They were quite persistent, and at one point we were swamped by those who were competing among themselves to sell their services. Usually, tourists from the big cities or a family group would be their main target. Because of their continual mobbing of tourists arriving on Langkawi, they are known, especially among the tourist officers, as *ulat bulu* (lit. hairy caterpillar). One local tourist officer even said of this group’s behaviour: “where there is a tourist, there will always be *ulat bulu*.” Inside Kuah Jetty, there are several duty-free shops selling various branded products, and in one corner of the jetty there is a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant, one of the few on Langkawi.

While Cik Na was waiting impatiently for her friend to collect us, I was nervous of meeting her friend and did not know what to expect. After a few minutes, a red shiny car approached us and a man in his mid-fifties with a white *kopiah* (cap) stepped out and greeted us. I was then introduced to Pak Zain, but because Cik Na was so tired, she simply mentioned to Pak Zain that I was her ‘foster daughter’, just met at the ferry. He did not ask much but ushered us into his car, which was driven by his son. On the journey to his village, we had to pass Pekan Kuah, the capital town of Langkawi, which is only about 5-minutes’ drive from Kuah Jetty.

On the way to Kuah town, we could see a huge carved rock depicting a red-brownish eagle with its wings outstretched for take-off into the skies. It was located near Kuah Jetty to welcome tourists to the island. This statue, 12 metres high and 18 metres wide, which has become a new landmark for Langkawi Island, cost the LADA about RM 1.18 million. As explained in one of the tourist brochures, the eagle's outstretched wings are said to be an apt symbol of the island's 'flight to prosperity.' They also symbolised the probability that Langkawi would one day become a 'leading tourist destination in the world'. Just a few yards away from the Eagle Square was another huge attraction, the Legend Park, which had recently opened to the public. Across the road, just opposite the Legend park, stood the RM 30 million 10-storey complex of the Langkawi Authority Development Association (LADA).

The LADA complex comprised the LADA headquarters, government departments, travel agencies, post office and shop lots (see plate 1). During my undergraduate research, when I entered the LADA office, it contained only a few desks and officers. When I returned to Langkawi, this small LADA office, which was located only a few metres away from the new LADA building, had been converted into a restaurant. The new huge LADA complex had now become the most impressive building on Langkawi. To the right, a new Sunshine shopping complex had recently been opened, which is described in its brochure as 'the first modern shopping complex' on the island. This shopping complex is similar to those which are usually found in cities, selling branded products and including fast food restaurants such as Kenny Rogers, McDonalds and Pizza Hut.

On Langkawi, most of the administrative offices as well as the main commercial and financial offices are still concentrated in the main town of Kuah. Langkawi is divided into seven *mukim* (districts), each of which is administered by a *Penghulu* (village

headman) who is elected by the state government and who is responsible to the local District Office. Each *mukim* comprises several village committees (*Jawatankuasa Kemajuan Kampung* or JKK), each of which includes a chairman, secretary and several committee members. Almost 99 per cent of the people on Langkawi Island are Malay Muslims. The local people can be divided into two different political factions: UMNO (the United Malays National Organisation) and PAS (the Islamic Party) though this does not mean that these differences are always obvious. The Malays are represented nationally by these two major political parties (see Kessler 1978; Nagata 1984; Mutalib 1993; Shamsul 1994).¹² UMNO, the ruling political party, places stress on the protection and propagation of Malay nationalism. While PAS also upholds this aim, its primary concern is with Islamic principles and values. The antagonism between these two groups has principally focused on *how* or *to what extent* the definition of state should be based on Islamic principles. While PAS's aim is to implement an Islamic state and Islamic Law, UMNO's leader, Mahathir Mohamad, has a different opinion of which direction to follow (see Shamsul 1994).

After a 20-minute drive, we finally reached a small village, Kg Anggerik. It was only when we were having coffee with the family that Cik Na told Pak Zain that I was going to do research (*kajian*) and needed a foster family to stay with. To my surprise, without having to answer many questions, I was accepted as their *anak angkat* (foster daughter). My new foster father was a middleman and owned several fishing boats that were rented out to fishermen. My foster parents had eight children of whom only the three youngest children lived with them. It never occurred to me that I should find a foster family so quickly. My role as 'foster daughter' was assumed so fast that on the evening of my first day in the village, I found myself driving a brand-new 'Honda

¹² UMNO is part of the alliance party, *Barisan Nasional* (the National Front) with MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), the major Chinese party in the ruling coalition and MIC (Malayan Indian Association).

Accord' car belonging to my foster brother-in-law, with my 'new' foster parents and their two friends, heading towards Kuah town for shopping. I was asked to take the wheel because my brother-in-law was busy and I was the only one in the family who could drive. Travelling along the new highway, I still could not believe the 'instant' trust that was given to me by my new foster family. Only then did I realise that my role as *anak angkat* (foster child) and anthropologist had just started.

During the first three months of my fieldwork, I had to move to three different foster families in different villages for I needed to find a suitable area of research for my focus of observation. Initially, when I was planning my fieldwork, I had already decided to find an area or village that had a mixture of local people, tourists, hotel workers and plenty of tourist accommodation. This was important to enable me to observe the interaction between these different groups of people, the business methods of the local chalet operators, and the activity of the tourist guides and beach boys. There were only two villages that were suitable bases for my fieldwork: Kg Indah and Kg Senang.

In Kuah town, new modern buildings have replaced old ones. Although the main administration offices are still concentrated in Kuah, local government has gradually shifted some of the administration offices from Kuah to another sub-district (*mukim*). In the Langkawi Structural Plan, it is estimated that the population of Langkawi will increase to 100 000 in 2005 (an increase of 67190 from 1985) (1992: 6-5). New housing areas have been planned to accommodate this increase. Much new housing has been built which is concentrated in Kuah town and more is still under construction to accommodate the increase number of outsiders who come to Langkawi to work. According to the Langkawi Structural Plan, 17,423 unit houses are needed between the year of 2001 – 2005 (1992: 6-5).

The new shop-lots have also been built in the other sub-district to encourage the development of the particular area. Previously, fishing and farming were the main sources of income of Langkawi people (see Carsten 1997). Since the development of tourism on Langkawi, many local villagers have gradually shifted their main income from fishing and agriculture to tourist businesses and services. Many local fishermen have turned their fishing boats into tourist boats and operate services such as 'Island hopping' to tourists. Since land prices have soared, local villagers have sold a portion of their land to provide capital for their investment in tourist businesses. Many local women including young married women who had never been employed before in their life began to work at various hotels in Langkawi. By working in hotels, restaurants, theme parks or shopping complexes, either as full-time or part-time workers, local women became the second contributors to the household economy. Those who have just left school would also be eager to find job at hotels or with local chalet operators to gain experience before venturing into small business or before pursuing their studies at the local college or universities outside Langkawi. Local men were either working in hotels or involved in chalet business. Some of them worked with chalet owners as beach boys, tourist boat operators or as an 'unofficial' guide to tourists.

Since many young people have decided to work in the local tourist industry, older people were left to do agricultural work, particularly paddy cultivation. During my fieldwork, I observed that many rice fields have been reclaimed for the purpose of the construction of new houses. Those who have extra land or inheritance land (*tanah pesaka*) would use the land to do business by building up new houses to be rented out to outsiders. This has become a new lucrative business for local villagers. Some villagers told me that they could not afford to work on the land due to old age while their children were too busy working to help them. Therefore, they said, it was better to build rental houses on their land rather than leaving it unattended. Furthermore it was not worth

growing paddy especially for those who have a small plot of land because of the increased cost of hiring machines and also buying fertilisers. Only a small number of local people still grew paddy but that was only because they did not want to see their land left unattended.

Although fishing has always been regarded by some local villagers as their main source of income, the fishing activity referred to by villagers as *pi ke laut* (go to sea) has gradually become a leisure activity to fill their free time. Most of these local villagers were Malay middlemen who used to work with Chinese middlemen. Now many local fishermen worked with these middlemen who provided the fishermen with fishing boats, petrol, boat engines and other facilities. When tourism became important, the demand for fresh fish and seafood such as cuttlefish, prawn, crabs from local restaurants and hotels also increased. This demand has given the local Malay middlemen an opportunity to diversify their businesses by becoming fish or seafood dealers. One local fish dealer told me that if he managed to catch a special type of fish, he would sell it with high price to the Underwater World theme park, one of the main tourist attractions in Langkawi that displaying nearly 5,000 species of fishes.

The Village of Kg Senang

The village of Kg Senang is situated on the west coast of Langkawi island, about 22 km from Kuah town. Kg Senang is part of the district of Kembang. There are five sub-villages located near to each other and there is no clear boundary between one village and another. The village is one of the many villages that are located near the coastal area in Langkawi. Kg Senang and its neighbouring village, Kg Indah, became one of the main tourist attractions because of their beautiful beaches and also because most of the hotels and chalets were located in that area. During my undergraduate research, I had already

heard rumours that the local government wanted to take over Kg Indah which created much anxiety and tension among the villagers. I left the village without knowing the fate of its occupants. When I returned to the village five years later, I found that all the chalets and houses had disappeared. All that remained was the signboard showing the names of the chalets, its colour faded. A noticeboard, on which was written 'Public Beach' had been erected beside the road. Since the land acquisition in Kg Indah, tourist activities had been concentrated in Kg Senang only then did I decide to base my fieldwork in Kg Senang. However, it took me nearly three months to settle there, for I had to move to three different foster families in three different villages before I finally found a suitable foster family in Kg Senang.

Although the village of Anggerik was about 5 minutes' drive from Kg Senang, I found it quite difficult to travel not only from Kg Anggerik to Kg Senang but also to other places on Langkawi because I did not have proper transport. The only public transport on the island is the *tekxi* (cab), which is too expensive for daily travel. So I decided to find another foster family, in or near Kg Senang. I was then contacted by a new family whose daughter was my niece's friend, who was still studying at a Teachers' Training College in Penang. The family of Pak Saad, my second foster family, lived in another village, which, I realised, was actually farther from Kg Senang than from the village of my first foster family. However, it was this foster family which introduced me to my third foster family which was living in Kg Senang. I had spent nearly two weeks at Pak Saad's house, doing interviews with neighbours and trying to establish my rapport in the village, when one day Pak Saad told me that his half-brother, Bali, who was married to a Thai woman with two daughters, was living in Kg Senang. Bali, who was just settling down on Langkawi after three years working in Penang, was renting a small 'traditional Kedah' house, owned by his neighbour, while waiting for his new house to be built. Pak Saad then took me to be introduced to his half-brother and his wife. They

seemed to be excited to accept me as their *adik angkat* (foster sister) Since the members of my new foster family were still in their mid-thirties, I just simply called them *abang angkat* (foster brother) and *kakak angkat* (foster sister).

The house which they were renting from their neighbour, Cik Na, had been left to the latter by her parents, who had died a few years earlier. Cik Na was living in a new brick house, built with the money that she received from the sale of part of her beach land. My foster family was occupying only the kitchen area, which had been extended so that the living room, kitchen, bathroom and one bedroom were all on the same floor. There was only one bedroom in the house and since, as I told, it was “not nice to let an *anak dara* (unmarried girl) sleep outside the room”, they let me have their bedroom while their two daughters slept on another bed outside my room, with only one cupboard separating the bed from the kitchen area. My foster sister and foster brother had to sleep on a thick mattress laid temporarily on the upper floor of the house.

Although my field site was based in Kg Senang, my observation also covered Kg Indah and Kg Anggerik. Kg Senang was one of the main centres for tourist activities and where most of tourist accommodation was concentrated. According to my initial plan, the choice of Kg Senang is based on the fact that the village was a mixture of different groups of people: local villagers, tourists, chalet operators, tourist guides, small tourism operators, beach boys and hotel workers. Although these groups of people were seen to go to the same shops and come into daily (at least face to face) contact with one another, this does not suggest personal acquaintance or interaction with one another. The local villagers would often say: “I have often seen such-and-such person around but have never really known him; he is just an outsider.”

In Kg Senang, there were 113 households, all of which were occupied by Malays.¹³ Every house had the basic facilities of electricity and sanitation, while 95 per cent had mains piped water. Local villagers in the age group of 15-45 comprised the highest proportion of the population. Employment of the local villagers was divided among the agricultural sector (32 percent), the hotel/tourism industry, (26.1 per cent), business (18.4 per cent), construction (18.8 per cent), and fishing (3.7 per cent). The houses were of three types: 13.3 per cent were of temporary construction (wooden), 23 per cent semi-permanent (wooden and cement), and 63.7 permanent (cement).

The main road linking the village to Kuah town and the rest of Langkawi was only five minutes' walk from my house. The economy of the village is heavily reliant on the local tourist industry. Most of the local villagers operate tourist businesses – chalets, rental houses, restaurants, food stalls (*warung makan*) or work in hotels as gardeners, hotel drivers, housekeepers etc. Fishing and farming have become their secondary source of income. They work in tourist services because these new jobs give them not only stability in term of monthly income but the job requires less physical strength and risk. Many households still owned rice field but they have stopped growing paddy due to lack of labour and the high cost in cultivating it.

All the chalets were located on both sides of the road, among hotels, shops and other tourist services. Across the road, behind the rows of the chalets was the Kg Senang beach. The local villagers' houses mostly stretched inland from the coastal area. Close to my house was an international hotel, a little way further on the same road was a new huge blue hotel which was said to have the highest number of rooms on Langkawi. The mosque, where most of local functions were held, was about ten minutes' walk from my house.

¹³ This statistic is based on figures given to me by the *Penghulu* of Kg Senang.

Throughout my fieldwork I saw new *rumah batu* (cement houses) springing up among the traditional wooden houses. There were also numerous houses built by local villagers for renting out to hotel employees or government servants from outside Langkawi. In the same compound of my house, semi-detached rented houses owned by Cik Ton, were rented out to a family from Kedah, whose daughter was working at one of the hotels nearby. Beside my foster family's house was a row of rented houses owned by another neighbour, whom the local villagers described as "among the richest men on Langkawi." He also owned a 200-room hostel, which was rented out to one of the hotels near the village to accommodate its employees. During my fieldwork, he was still living with his wife in his old wooden house, not far from the hostel while waiting to move into his new brick house, which was still under construction at the back of his old house.

Four types of houses have been built in Kg Senang: the traditional stilt house, traditional stilt houses with a ground level kitchen, modern houses with all sections of the house on ground level. Traditional houses were mostly wooded. Almost half of the houses in the village were cement houses, locally known as *rumah batu* (brick house) or 'a house with modern design' (*rumah bentuk moden*). The new generations of Kg Senang were quite concerned about the type of house that they wanted to build. Many local villagers preferred to build *rumah batu* than *rumah papan* (wooden house).

As one villager said to me, "people today don't want to built wooden houses any more. They prefer brick houses" (*orang sekarang dah tak nak rumah kayu lagi, semua nak rumah batu*). When I asked why, he simply answered, "because it's cheaper and cooler". Although his answer was expected, his preference of *rumah batu* to *rumah papan* could also manifest his new aspirations to have a 'modern house'. Local villagers built these new modern houses either to replace their old wooden house or to rent it out to

outsiders. This new type of house have also become a favourite choice for newly married children who would usually build the house in the same compound as their parent's house. As mentioned by Carsten, a compound usually consists of houses belonging to a single kinship group or extended family with newly married children building a house next to their parent's house (1997: 163). Newly married children would build their own house only metres away from their parents or their siblings' houses.

A house usually consists of two or three bedrooms, a living room and a big kitchen. Most households in the village owned a complete set of kitchen electrical goods such as rice cooker, washing machine, refrigerator, blender etc. Local villagers especially local women claimed that all these devices were important in their life today as they could reduce their time spent doing domestic chores. Only a few villagers, particularly, older people, were still seen using the traditional method to do certain tasks. For example, they used millstones with a stoneroller (*pengiling*) instead of blender for grinding even though some of them have blenders at home. They claimed that pounded chilies or spices (*cili atau rempah tumbuk*) tasted better than blended chilies (using a blender). In fact, there was one old lady in the village who would get paid from several local villagers to grind dried chilies for them using the *pengiling*. She would sit on a small bench, which was under her wooden house with her *pengiling* at her side. While waiting for her customers, she chatted with her neighbours who were also taking a rest from doing the housework. Just before the mid-day, several of her regular customers came with a bowl of dried chilies or spices to be pounded by her. She charged RM 2 for each bowl.

Television is an important feature of the community's nightly entertainment. Television, video players, VCD players and Radio have become the main important items in a household. Almost all of the households in the village owned at least one of

these items. Some households have subscribed to Astro channel, a cable that can transmit American and British programmes. Even though, none of the households in the village had a computer, computers have become a topic of conversation among the children in the village. Several children in the village took up a computer lesson offered by a local man who runs a computer shop not far from the village. The man was originally from outside Langkawi but has become a 'Langkawi person' when he married a local woman and decided to settle down permanently in Langkawi. The awareness of the importance of this new technology was evidenced when many of the local villagers expressed their desire to have a computer at home for their children. A few months after I left, my foster brother told me that he had bought a computer for his children and began to learn how to use email. This new desire for the latest technology shows how local villagers were becoming gradually immersed into the world of commodities.

There is one primary school within the village attended by the local children. Older children attended secondary school, which is co-educational, approximately six km away from the village. Although many local children did not complete their secondary school because of various reasons, some of them managed to further their studies to the local college or university. Those who did not complete their studies were usually ended up doing the same work like their parents or their other siblings do.

Local villagers buy their groceries from several shops, which are situated within the village or just outside the village. Local villagers would usually go to the shop in the village because the shop also selling vegetables, fish, grated coconut etc while tourists prefer to go to the supermarket which is located near the main road. Therefore, those who seldom go out from the village would have a limited contact with tourists. Most of the villagers perform their daily prayers at home except on Fridays when all the men attend the congregational prayers at the mosque not far from the village. Kg Senang have a

surau (prayer house) of its own but the building was really old and attended only by several villagers who seemed to be the old people in the village.

Local villagers especially old villagers still go about in the village on foot but motorcycle has become the most practical transport for young villagers. Morning and evening would be the busiest hours for local women. It is a common scene in the village to see many women ride on their motorcycle to send and pick up their children to and from school or to the market to buy groceries or to visit friends outside their house's compound. Besides motorcycle, many of the households in the village also owned cars. The only public transport available in the village was taxi or van taxi but local villagers seldom used it as they were very expensive. Those who live far from the main road would still have to walk to the main road to get a taxi. Furthermore, a trip to the town centre, which is about 12 km, would cost between RM 3 – RM 12, depending on the number of people in one taxi. Therefore, motorcycle became a convenient vehicle for local villagers to make a trip to Kuah town. This would mean that travelling to Kuah town was not an arduous task anymore since the trip would only take about 30 minutes from the village. The village of Kg Senang has experienced demographic change since the development of tourism in Langkawi when there is an increase in the number of outsiders in the village. These outsiders were either rented villagers' houses or stayed at a hostel, which also located within the village area, provided by their employers. Villagers began to build new terrace houses to generate income from outsiders who needed a place to stay. The village becomes the favourite choice for outsiders due to its close location to the hotel where they work. Since then, many local villagers who have extra land, either own land or inheritance land (*tanah pesaka*) began to get involved in rental house business (*perniagaan rumah sewa*).

The construction of many modern houses has gradually changed the housing pattern in Langkawi. This new housing pattern shows the mixture of *rumah batu* and *rumah papan* and portrays a blend of modern house and traditional house. With this modern type of house, the thatched *nipah* palm roofs or zinc roofs was gradually being replaced by tiled roofs. Mosaic floors replaced cement floors. This housing pattern depicts a symbolic contrast between what is traditional and what is modern. It also portrays that the local concept of modern is distinct from that of the traditional. This modern trend of housing in Langkawi epitomised one of the aspirations of Langkawi people to embrace modernity.

The Economic Relations of Langkawi Island and Kedah state

Since the late 1980s, Langkawi has grown into a significant administrative and commercial centre. This development has resulted from its incorporation into an expanding world economy. Langkawi island, thus, became an integral part of the economic development of Kedah state. Langkawi is depending heavily economically and politically on the Kedah mainland. The population of Langkawi has increased from 29 088 in 1980 to 33,000 in 1990 and again increased to 53,000 in 1996 (Hadi 1996). Since there is an influx of tourists and outsiders on the island, many products such as fish, foods, chicken, clothes, have to be imported from the mainland. The increased of outsiders on the island also created a higher demands on new products which has resulted in the opening of several shopping complexes in Kuah town and several supermarkets in other areas. Many Langkawi people buy the products from the Kedah mainland to be sold it on the island. Carsten noted that Langkawi people frequently speak of 'going to Kedah' when they make trips to the mainland (1997:30). Even today, Langkawi people do still refer people from outside Langkawi as 'people from the mainland side' (*orang disebelah luar*). Obviously, the frequency of daily trips to Kedah are higher than few years ago due

to the increased number of ferry services and also the increased number of local people making trips to Kedah for business purposes. The dealers are mostly in Kedah mainland or other states such as Terengganu and Kelantan or from other neighbouring countries. Local entrepreneurs also have to make frequent trips to outside Langkawi to find new products for their businesses.

The increased number of ferry services and daily trips made by Langkawi people to Kedah for business purposes also reflect the changing perceptions of outsiders towards Langkawi people. One local woman recalled her time when she was young. She told me that when she visited her sister in Alor Setar (the capital city of Kedah), the people from the mainland greeted her "...the island people has arrived" (*orang pulau dah sampai*). She became embarrassed and felt inferior because the word '*orang pulau*' has a derogative connotation that carries meaning of 'old-fashioned (*kolot*), stupid (*bodoh*) and poor. Another middle-aged local man recalled the time when he was in his mid-twenties, he went to Kedah to continue his studies at a local technical institution. He used to feel very embarrassed when his friends gave him a 'different look' whenever he told them that he came from Langkawi. He said, "people at that time have perceptions that Langkawi people came from isolated (*ulu*) area. Even the government servants were often refused to be sent to Langkawi to serve because outsiders used to make a joke that Langkawi was a place only for jins (*tempat jin bertendang*). Today, 'going to Kedah' is not only for 'visiting kins, wedding or funeral' (Carsten 1997) but for business purposes either to meet business dealers or to buy new products. Since it took a shorter time to go to Kedah, Langkawi people claimed that 'going to Kedah' was just like making a routine trip from their villages to Kuah town.

The development of tourism in Langkawi has become one of the main sources of income for the state of Kedah. If previously Langkawi was the poorest district in

Langkawi, today Langkawi has become the most growing district in Kedah. Langkawi district brings the highest revenue in tourist receipts. In 1996, tourism receipts for Kedah state was RM 1.13 billion and out of that, 73 per cent (RM 821.1 million) was contributed by tourists who visited Langkawi island. The number shows the importance of Langkawi island in terms of economic contribution to Kedah state. Hence, the development of tourism in Langkawi has indeed strengthened the close link between the Kedah state and the island.

Methodology: Strategies and Difficulties in Fieldwork

Motorcycles were the main means of transport in the village, although car user had increased. Since my foster sister did not have transport to take her children to school and go to the shops, my foster brother, who drove to work, bought her a motorcycle. However, since she still did not have a motorcycle licence, she would ask me to collect the children from school or to do the shopping. After I had stayed with her for four weeks, she decided to lend the motorcycle to me so that I could use it to see my informants or conduct interviews with local villagers and the authorities in Kuah town. On many occasions, my foster brother was kind enough to lend me his car (which my foster sister really enjoyed for she could join me to do her shopping in town) if I had to go to Kuah town for interviews with the local authorities.

Since I had my 'own' motorcycle, collecting my foster sisters from school became part of my routine as foster sister (*adik angkat*). It was during this time that I developed my network of friendship with a group of local women who were also waiting for their children in the school compound. We would normally gather in the car park in the school compound and then the invitations to visit them at home were extended to me. Invitations flourished and the words '*datanglah rumah*' (come to my house) became

common whenever I met new local villagers. I made a point of visiting these local women in order to develop closer relations with them. Sometimes I went to their home by myself, but most of the time my foster sister accompanied me. During my first few weeks, my foster sister took me to almost every function in the village and introduced me to her friends and neighbours, telling them that I was 'studying in Scotland' and wanted to do research into tourism on Langkawi (*buat kajian pasal pelancungan*). There were so many students from local universities who came to do research that the local villagers thought that I was 'just another student'. In a way, this perception helped in preventing my being asked to explain my research interest further. I was often asked what I was going to be after I finished my studies and when I told them that I should be a teacher (instead of saying lecturer) at a university, they started to call me *cikgu* (teacher). This status as *cikgu* created a kind of 'safe' position for me to conduct my fieldwork in the village. Being a 'student' or 'teacher' was often seen as a 'neutral' and unthreatening position that allowed me access to various kinds of information and places.

The status of being a trainee teacher who was doing a practical course gave me a kind of respectability in the village. It also portrayed my sincerity, which did not arouse any suspicious feelings among the local villagers if I mentioned my research. In fact, one of the local women and my foster sister's daughter continued to call me *cikgu* until the day I left the village. This status gave me the authority to converse with male visitors who came to my foster mother's house. After several meetings with local women I was then introduced to the Women's Institute (WI). This network of friendship provided me with access to local entrepreneurs and potential informants, for many of the WI members were the wives of local entrepreneurs. Through these women, I made arrangements to interview their husbands, usually in their chalet offices. Interview appointments were normally confirmed by telephone, for almost all of the local villagers had telephones.

As well as mixing with local people and attending local functions, I also spent time with the tourist guides and beach boys and experienced their daily activities. I never thought that the beach could become an important place to develop my network of friendship with my informants, especially with the tourist guides and beach boys. In the evening, a group of beach boys would be seen playing volleyball on the beach, while for local villagers, walking on the beach (*pergi pantai*) with their children had become a leisure activity, and also to “see people” (*tengok orang*). I desperately wanted to be introduced to the tourist guides but realised the only way was to approach them on the beach. During one of my walks on the beach, I came across my junior friend at university, who was married to a local chalet operator. She then invited me to her chalet, which was only fifteen minutes’ walk from my foster family’s house, and introduced me to her husband, Syukur. Syukur, who was in his late twenties, had played a part in the chalet business with his family since he was 20 years old. Knowing that I might be interested in talking to tourists, Syukur was kind enough to offer me a free three-nights’ stay in one of his chalets, which, he said, would give me an opportunity to observe and interview tourists. On the second day of my stay, I was having my breakfast in the chalet restaurant when a young man wearing a T-shirt and Bermuda shorts approached me. He introduced himself as Farid, a tourist guide who was very fluent in English and Japanese. He was employed by a travel agency, but also worked part-time with Syukur as a freelance tourist guide.

During my stay at the chalet, Farid gave me the opportunity to experience the duties of a tourist guide by taking me to collect a German tourist from the airport. He became one of my good informants when he invited me several times to join his tour (at discount rate!) with foreign and domestic visitors to the marine park on Payar island, about 40 minutes’ journey by speedboat from Langkawi Island. It was also through his connection that I managed to develop my own network of friendship with other tourist

guides and beach boys. It was during this trip that I met Mardina, a 40-year-old freelance tourist guide who had recently won the 'Tourist Guide of the Year' award for the second time. Having a small gift shop near the beach, she would divide her time between managing her shop and taking groups of domestic and foreign tourists on guided tours. Sometimes, she would visit her shop while waiting for her group of tourists to finish exploring a place of interest. Taking part in these trips with tourist guides and tourists gave me valuable insights into the contact between tourists and their contact with local people, which I discuss in chapters 2 and 3.

Despite my status of being female and single, I did not have much difficulty interacting with local men such as beach boys and male tourist guides, who were often seen in public areas such as the beach and hotels. This I think, can be attributed to my 'technological devices' – my video camera and still camera - which became important tools in my fieldwork, especially at village functions and also on guided tours. I found that my interaction with local young men was greatly facilitated by the use of my video camera, which gave me a sense of being one of the group. I found that local villagers were really excited to be recorded on my video. Some of them thought that I was a journalist from TV3 (a famous television network in Malaysia) and I used that opportunity to approach them and start a conversation with them. Interestingly, they seemed to be very co-operative in answering my questions, hoping that I would record the conversation. I used my position as video recorder or photographer at local events to go beyond the usual territory, which would otherwise have been impossible. It was also because of my video camera that I was often invited to local functions, not only as a guest but also to help with the preparations. However, the invitation was sometimes used by a few of the local villagers, whom I knew well, as a strategy to have the event recorded free of charge. As my fieldwork progressed I found that the task of video

recording was very demanding. Therefore, I had no choice but to produce several 'polite' excuses such as "the camera has run out of batteries" or "the video is just not working."

Having a video camera was always associated with being a 'tourist', a status which I often refused to admit but never succeeded in avoiding. I always felt that to be identified as 'tourist' reduced my sense of being 'local.' On many occasions I was regarded as a 'tourist', and when I asked why, the reply was usually that it was because I had a video camera. That was why every time that I was asked where I came from by people from outside the village, I found myself emphasising my status as the 'foster daughter of such-and-such a person', which indeed was my attempt to show my 'close' connection with local people. Since many of these people knew my foster families and sometimes were related to them, it created a kind of instant relationship. This made it easier for them to give information, which would not have been possible if I had not been the 'foster daughter of such-and-such a person.' However, sometimes I would simply hide my status of 'foster daughter' and describe myself as 'tourist' or 'researcher', not only to enable me to obtain information that would have been inaccessible if I were known as the 'foster daughter of such-and-such a person', but also to avoid any conflict. This was particularly important when I had to deal with the local authorities. On one occasion I was interviewing a local official, who was handling cases of land acquisition, when he expressed his dissatisfaction towards a certain local villager, who happened to be my good informant. At that point, I felt relieved at not revealing my close relationship with that local villager, formed after making frequent visits to that person's home. In my fieldwork, the change of identity between researcher and tourist seemed to be unavoidable. In fact this overlap of identities faced by anthropologists who are doing tourism research has been acknowledged by scholars (Crick 1985; Bruner 1995).

I have mentioned earlier that I moved to three different families in three different villages in order to find a suitable area as my focus of observation. Being a foster daughter three times over gave me the advantage of establishing a rapport with more neighbours and immediate relatives, and so my network of friends and contacts gradually expanded. However, I found that the wider the network of families, the heavier my task in fulfilling my obligations as 'foster daughter', particularly to the three 'foster families'. Their generosity and constant hospitality put me in a difficult position to reciprocate as expected, at least in my own judgement. One of my foster fathers was a prawn dealer at the local market, while his son-in-law was a chicken dealer there. I knew that on every trip to the local market, I could never leave without a plastic bag of fresh prawns in one hand, which cost about RM12, and a whole chicken in the other hand, both given by my foster father and foster brother. Although I often insisted on paying, they refused to accept the money. At one point, during my trips to the market with my foster sister, I decided to hide away in a corner to avoid my foster father and brother-in-law. Within minutes, I saw my foster father coming towards me, carrying a plastic bag of prawns and a whole chicken in his hand.

The relationships between anthropologists and their informants always entail reciprocal obligations. The sense of guilt at not being able to reciprocate as expected often haunted me as 'foster daughter'. One example that I can give is the practice of *pesan beli*, asking people to buy something when they visit cities outside Langkawi. My work required me to make several trips to Kuala Lumpur either to do research at the National Library or just to visit my sister. It became common practice for local villagers, especially those who were close to me to ask me to buy such things as headscarves, batik dresses, etc. in Kuala Lumpur, for they were cheaper and there was a wider choice in comparison with Langkawi. One local woman even asked me to buy goods in bulk because she wanted to 'make business' on Langkawi. I found that the demands of this

pesan beli were too intense. It was not only that I had a very short time in which to buy the items in KL, but also, I was short of money. However, as a foster daughter, it was very hard for me to refuse these requests. Sometimes, to avoid being asked to buy things, I simply did not tell anyone apart from my foster family of my next visit to Kuala Lumpur. I informed the others only after my return to Langkawi. This strategy often provoked mutterings of frustration, which created a sense of guilt in me for not being able to reciprocate as expected. However, constant reassurance from my foster sister that I should not feel obliged to 'buy things' for them since I was still a student and always lacked money, as she emphasised, helped me to cope with that sense of guilt.

I expected that my unmarried female status would put me in a position in which I should become both the anthropologist who observed and the object of observation and interrogation by local people (see Karim 1993). The question of whether I was already married was quite straightforward, and I had not difficulty in giving a straight answer. During the first week of my fieldwork, Pak Ngah had advised me that the requirements of a good daughter were to behave politely (*berbudibahasa*) towards older people and to be 'good in the kitchen.' One day, to my surprise, Pak Ngah's wife grabbed my hand and led me to a room. She whispered to me that I had to be careful in my dealings with my foster brothers, who were already married. She told me, "Don't talk much with them." Both of my foster brothers were staying in different houses but often came to my foster mother's house because their chicken business premises were located at the back. They both sold and distributed chickens to the local market. I had expected the advice but it never occurred to me that there was more to it than 'not to talk much' with my foster brothers.

It was only in the middle of my fieldwork when I realised that her advice was due to the threat that women from outside (*perempuan luar*) could pose to local women. One

of the local women then told me that the increase of wealth among local men had also increased their desire to have more than one wife (polygamy). Women from outside Langkawi (including Thai girls) were preferable as second wives (*bini kedua*) because, as one local man told me, they were “different from local women.” Being an outsider myself who, as I was often told, was “young and available”, I became a potential threat to young married local women. This explained why my foster sisters-in-laws were quite ‘unfriendly’ to me during the first few weeks of my stay with my foster family. However, things began to change when I tried my best not to talk to their husbands and when they began to realise my main purpose for being there.

Being Malay, having the same culture and faith, and doing ‘fieldwork at home’ did not mean that I could escape the dilemmas and difficulties of being in the field. Although I was similar to those in the community which I studied, I came from a totally different state located in the south of Peninsular Malaysia. During the preparation of my fieldwork, my supervisor was very concerned about the different factions in the community and advised me to be well prepared in dealing with these groups.

As in other states in Malaysia, local politics in Langkawi were divided between the two parties, UMNO and PAS. Their loyal followers were normally called PAS people (*orang PAS*) or UMNO people (*orang UMNO*). Carsten (1997) noted the political division between followers of the ruling UMNO and those of PAS in the early 1980s. The division among local Muslims had led to disputes over economic resources such as government benefits, which were given only to government supporters. Followers of the two parties were attending different mosques for prayer. The numbers of supporters of these two parties would vary from village to village, and was indicated by the way in which local people referred to certain villages. For example, when one said, “the PAS in that village is strong,” it would indicate that the majority of the people in that particular

village were PAS followers. The strength of political support could influence the villagers' style of dress and the careful way in which they discussed politics.

Although I thought that I had sufficiently prepared myself, the fact that I had little idea of the kind of response these people might give me reminded me to be always on the alert. Having to stay with different families in different villages gave me the opportunity to observe the differences in political views and experience the state of relationships between PAS and UMNO, a chance I would have missed had I been confined to only one village. It was in the first village that I gained my first experience in dealing with PAS people.

Within three days of my arrival in the village, my first foster parents took me to visit their relatives. Pak Ngah, who introduced me to my first foster family, advised me on what I should do and how to behave as a foster daughter towards different groups of people in the village. Each time we paid a visit, Pak Ngah would explain to me that the person that we were going to visit was either *orang* PAS or *orang* UMNO. By saying that a particular person was *orang* PAS, he was also indicating that we should be careful how we dressed and how we spoke to him or her. Pak Ngah told me that this particular person was very critical about the way people dressed, and his comments were particularly embarrassing to those who did not cover their *aurat*.¹⁴ Even my foster mother used to be criticised for wearing a skimpy scarf. Pak Ngah advised me not to argue with this person if he tried to make any comments about me. At that stage I did not think my dress would inspire criticism; all I had to do was remember to be wear modest *baju kurung* (traditional dress). A quick but thorough rummage through my suitcases proved futile as

¹⁴ *Aurat* is an Arabic word referring to certain part of the bodies that should not be exposed. According to Islamic law, Muslim men and women have certain *aurat*. For Muslim men, their *aurat* is from waist down to the knees; the *aurat* of Muslim women is the whole body except the face and hands.

I suddenly remembered, not without a slight burst of panic, that I had not brought my *baju kurung*. When I told my foster mother, she convinced me that as long as my dress covered my *aurat*, I should not be suspected of breaching the modesty code. So, for the visit I wore long black trousers and a long-sleeved blouse. I was quite surprised that the woman did not even make any comments about my attire.

During my stay in the village I often consulted my foster mother about whether I should wear *baju kurung* for meeting local people. This was not to say that I was not aware of the expectation but I preferred to wear jeans and a T-shirt. Most of the time I indulged in my preference, encouraged by the fact that my foster mother never objected. This flexible attitude might be related to the gradual change among local women, especially the younger generation, in wearing trousers and loose blouses for leisure activities, which I discuss in chapter 6.

Asked about the current situation between PAS and UMNO, my foster mother's brother, whose house was close to my house, pointed out to me that the situation was less strained compared with several years ago. Then, he told me, the differences in their political ideology were openly manifested. The PAS people considered themselves to be 'good Muslims' while perceiving the UMNO people to be not 'truly Muslim'. Members of one party would not attend any *kenduri* (feast) hosted by the other party, whether or not an invitation had been extended. The PAS people said that they would refuse to eat a meal served at a *kenduri* hosted by UMNO people because it was not clean. However, the UMNO people asserted that the PAS members' refusal to eat the meal offended the host and therefore soured the relationship between them. Relations between them were tense when the UMNO and the PAS prayed in separate mosques, consequently dividing the people by party on the doorstep of the two mosques.

However, my informant explained, that happened years ago. The hostile relations between local PAS and UMNO gradually diminished after the debate on their differences, and the public manifestation of their differences also quietened down. Local informants were very optimistic about the amicable relations between the local PAS and UMNO when they argued that public debate between these two political parties was extremely rare today. During my period of fieldwork, conflict between people was almost unheard of. Even when dealing with people from both parties, I did not experience any unpleasant situations resulting from their differences in political ideology. I noticed that when two people from the different parties met, they would try not to touch upon anything 'political' because this kind of discussion might lead to a long heated argument which they seemed anxious to avoid. Even when I questioned their perceptions of the impact of tourism on their lives, their opinions seemed tied to their religious beliefs rather than their political ideology.

When asked for opinions, they would generally refer to themselves as 'we *orang Islam*' rather than 'we *orang PAS*' or 'we *orang UMNO*'. When the question about relations between PAS and UMNO came up, the general answer I received was "Things have changed now, it is not as it was few years ago" (*sekarang dah berubah, tak macam dulu*). When I demanded a reason for this change, my informant told me that PAS people had become wiser (*cerdik*), for they could differentiate between religious aspects and political strategies. Today, the local villagers would prefer to keep their political ideologies to themselves and avoid discussions about their differences.

The Ethnography of Langkawi Island

My fieldwork is based on the ethnography of the village of Kg Senang, a village still predominantly inhabited by native Malay people. It is undeniable that the impact of

tourism development has permeated into every aspect of the lives of the local people on Langkawi island. Although my fieldwork has been focussed primarily on one village in Langkawi, the village of Kg Senang, it should be stated here that my observations and interviews were not limited within the confines of this village but have also included several other villages on the island. The interviews I conducted were carried out during regular visits to houses belonging to the relatives of my foster family which were located within various villages throughout Langkawi. During these visits, I took the opportunity to observe and ask questions to the local villagers. This provided me the opportunity of counterchecking whether there existed differences or contradictions of perception between these people and the local people of Kg Senang village where I was residing and focusing my investigative studies.

Having said that, I should mention here that my analysis was restricted solely to the Malay ethnic group and therefore did not directly represent the other main ethnic groups in Langkawi, that of Chinese and Indian origin. I am aware that the perceptions of both these ethnic groups would have enriched my analysis with their distinct cultural perceptions towards tourism development. However the absence of these perceptions does not alter the main themes I have presented and discussed in this thesis. The different geographic location of these ethnic groups is one of the main factors which contributed to me having very limited interactions with any other ethnic group. The Indian ethnic group were concentrated on the eastern side of the island within the rubber plantations thus I had almost no contact with this group, while my interactions with the ethnic Chinese was limited to my shopping trips to the local supermarket. The Chinese were mostly concentrated within the town area.

The fact that I am interested in how the Malay Muslim negotiated the changes brought by tourism development would explain the restriction of my analysis to only

Malay ethnic people. My fieldwork might have been based on one village in Langkawi, but since the Malay Muslim people represent 90 percent of the population of Langkawi, my analysis could be taken to represent the wider Malay community throughout Langkawi island.

When discussing the ethnography of the island of Langkawi, Carsten's book, *The Heat of the Hearth* becomes a classic example of the ethnography of the everyday lives of Langkawi people. Her book was based on her fieldwork in Langkawi Island in the early 1980s, before tourism development took place on the Island. Only seven years later the Malaysian government declared Langkawi as a duty-free port, which then became the turning-point resulting in massive changes in Langkawi.

Carsten's main argument was that kinship was not a fixed process. In her book, she gives descriptions on how kinship is created through procreation and the most importantly through living together and sharing food, which she referred to as the process of incorporation. Incorporation involves the process of becoming Langkawi people, which also involves a further process to erase differences among themselves in order to create similarity. She argues that Langkawi people characterised themselves as poor people and as fishing people linking each other in the idiom of equality (1997: 12). Since land is a less significant resource than on mainland Kedah, this has meant that inequalities based on the differential ownership and control of land and its inheritance have been less marked than on the mainland (1997: 31). Hence, ownership of land and land inheritance was not seen as a means of wealth difference.

However, the development of tourism that began to take place during the late 1980s has gradually changed various aspects of local people's lives. My thesis has shown how the tourism development has changed the Langkawi peoples relationships with each

other, their relationships with land, their perceptions towards development, their pattern of consumption, and marked the beginning of differences in terms of wealth and social status among different groups of people in Langkawi. Langkawi people began to categorise each other according to their income sources and conceptualise their own concept of *kaya* (rich).

The development of tourism has witnessed the increased rise of land prices in langkawi. It has generated thousand of ringgits to those who owned land on the Island. Suddenly, for those who had acres of land it was like owning a bank and become a significant symbol of their wealth. Those who owned businesses such as chalet operators would be claimed as 'new rich people' (*orang kaya baru*). The emergence of this group of local entrepreneurs groups has emphasized their high status in the local community. Besides that, the development of tourism has brought along with it the process of modernity where local people are gradually being incorporated into the world of commodities. They conceptualised the concept of *moden* Malay, which are different from that of traditional Malay. This *moden* identity is emphasized through the possession of a *moden* house, *moden* goods, *moden* dress etc. Hence, being *moden* has also been associated with a degree of affluence. Personal possession has become an important symbol of individual aspirations to be seen rich and to become *moden*.

This thesis has described how the process of tourism development has witnessed the emergence of class differences in the local community although they were still trying to maintain their similarity as village people and also Muslim people. Even though Langkawi people were continuously insisting upon their similarity and strongly denying any differences between themselves by asserting that they were still 'village people' (*orang kampung*) and Muslim people, the differences in terms of wealth and class began

to emerge in the local community. This scenario could be used as an indication of their aspirations to become members of a middle class group.

One might argue that these scenarios seem to challenge the idiom of equality among the villagers. However, interestingly, no matter what their actions were, they still tried to maintain the equality and in fact constantly maintained their similarity as Langkawi people. The wealth and status differences indeed presented a challenge to the local villagers to maintain equality and similarity as village people. Despite their differences, the expectation to maintain equality is still high. Hence, although the new middle class group aspired to be connected with people from a higher status group, they were still expected to maintain their values and to perform their role as village people and as Muslim people. This similarity is manifested in their effort to maintain their connection with local villagers by actively being involved in local activities. Participating in local activity such as *gotong royong*, emphasised a strong sense of similarity and equality between the participants was important in terms of portraying their effort to maintain their similarity as village people regardless of their differences in terms of wealth.

Apart from the issues I have presented above, I have argued in this thesis that there is a marked distinction between outsiders and the native Langkawi people. And despite this distinction, the process of incorporating outsiders to become Langkawi people as argued by Carsten is still widely practised today although it may now only involve those who are willing to be incorporated.

Therefore, it can be said here that there are certain aspects of the local culture of Langkawi people that have changed or are changing due to the development of tourist. However, there are other aspects that are still maintained or at least are trying to be

maintained by the local people. This thesis is about the process of negotiation by Langkawi people towards the process of change brought on by tourism development. I demonstrate that this process of change does not occur without conflict. It involves contradiction and negotiation. The contradictions arose when the people were trying to maintain their *kampung* values but negotiation became an important tool for them to adapt themselves with these changes. During this process of negotiation, religious belief has been significantly used and to a certain extent religious idioms have been manipulated by different groups of people in the local community as a means of justifying their actions.

Summary of the Thesis

The collection of data for this thesis was done by conducting interviews and taking part in and observing everyday activities. Structured interviews were normally conducted with local authorities or hotel managers, whereas informal interviews were preferred by the local villagers. Bearing in mind the eclectic nature of tourism studies, questions were posed from a different angle. Rather than asking directly about the impact of tourism development, as would normally be done, I first asked the local people for their overall view of tourism development in their area. In directly asking, 'What is the impact of tourism', there is a danger of prejudicing the informant to give a one-sided opinion. The term 'impact' itself often implies the negative aspect of the issue concerned. The counterfactual questions such as 'how would things have been without tourism development' gave a different kind of information on their actual view of tourism development. These approaches can counter the tendency to oversimplify the assessment of tourism (Pearce 1997).

Chapter 1 discusses the historical development of tourism on Langkawi and how it has changed the physical aspect of the island. It was revealed that on many issues the people of Langkawi were in agreement over the role played by tourism development on Langkawi. In this chapter, I discuss how they thought of 'development.' The word 'development' or *pembangunan* was frequently used to describe Langkawi. It was apparent that the concept of 'development' became strongly associated with physical change, such as the increase in hotel construction, a new road system, a new telecommunication service, etc. They acknowledged that the declaration of duty-free status in 1987 was the turning point, leading to sudden development (*pembangunan mengejut*) on Langkawi. The fact that modernisation and tourist development were occurring hand in hand made it impossible for the islanders to separate one from the other. The drastic changes had increased their fear and anxiety, expressed in their negotiation, which I discuss in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the relations between land and local identity, an association which gradually emerged when the government began to implement the Land Acquisition Act to take over land from local people. The first half of the chapter is focused on the history of land on Langkawi and the implementation of the new Act. The second half of the chapter is devoted to the narratives of local villagers, which provide a poignant testimony to the themes of land and identity. This section describes how the implementation of the new act became the starting-point of strong resentment by the local villagers towards the local authorities and how different strategies were used to retain the land. It was during this period of conflict that the association between land and its symbolic representation of their identity as Langkawi people began to emerge. The Land Acquisition Act imposed by the local government not only resulted in conflict between villagers and local authorities but also manifested the changed attitude of the islanders towards land.

Chapter 3 focuses on the discussion of the use of local myths and space by tourists. The main concern of this chapter is to examine the images employed by tourism operators and local government in portraying Langkawi as a tourist attraction. It discusses how the spatial forms are conceptualised and appropriated. For economic reasons, local tourist agencies, particularly LADA, have control over the 'tourist gaze' by the manipulation of local myths.

Chapter 4 builds directly on and is in many respects an extension of chapter 3 in the sense that it continues to study the interaction between tourists and local people. The main concern of this chapter is to show the extent of contact between tourists and local people in order to analyse its impact on them. I argue that different kinds of tourist activities greatly influence the degree of interaction between tourists and local people. It is argued that the failure to acknowledge this fact might lead to a superficial generalisation of the effect of tourist-resident interaction. Therefore, I discuss in this chapter the type of activities in which tourists normally take part, and the timing and degree of interaction with local people.

Chapter 5 deals with the negotiation of local villagers with the employment of concepts and meanings of 'faith', 'taking care of oneself' (*pandai jaga diri*), and 'shame' (*malu*), which are dominant symbols in many aspects of Malay society and culture. The main concern of this chapter is the ways in which these symbols and their meanings are invoked to justify actions that at times seem to be contradictory. The first section of the chapter provides an explanation of the local concept of 'faith' and its relation to the concepts of 'taking care of oneself' and 'shame.' The second section discusses how local villagers use these concepts to justify their practices. The

contradictory use of these concepts shows how different interpretations of Islamic teachings have been used.

Chapter 6 mainly examines modernity and the new patterns of consumption on Langkawi. I argue that the modernisation brought by development, particularly tourism, has put Langkawi people in the front line of modernisation. This negotiation with modernity has created a new pattern of consumption in a way in which local people have turned to new kinds of activities. The arrival of modern products that were previously available only in urban areas, such as cars, mobile phones, beauty products and the latest fashions, has increased the desire of the local people for these new products, and their patterns of consumption have gradually changed. I argue that process of consumption and becoming *moden* are symbolised by the possession of 'modern objects' and by their public display. The first section of this chapter discusses the consumption of these 'modern' objects and how they are used to symbolise the meaning of being *moden* and 'having a lot of money.'

The second section will discuss why having 'one's own money' (*duit sendiri*) is the main means of appropriating new commodities and images. Having *duit sendiri* is not just about autonomy in managing money but rather about spending the money, particularly for one's own pleasure such as buying the latest beauty products or clothes. I suggest that this autonomy in 'spending' and 'managing' money, portrays a different kind of freedom. I also discuss how the intensity of the desire to take part in these 'new commodified patterns of sociality' (Mills 1997: 46), despite the inability to sustain those images due to limited wages, has often pushed some of the local people into financial difficulties.

Chapter 7 focuses on the emergence of a new category of 'business-minded' people and their strong influence on the local community. I argue that the development of tourism produced these entrepreneurs owing to the establishment of local tourism businesses. Their knowledge of business, frequent contact with outsiders, and previous work experience outside Langkawi resulted in a high degree of self-consciousness in performing their obligations to the local community. Therefore, rather than detaching themselves from the local community, their attachment to it was actually strengthened. The first section of the chapter discusses how this new group emerged and its role in re-establishing local women's organisations. The last section examines whether this new group fits into the definition of 'middle class' on Langkawi.

Land and Identity

On Langkawi, the need for land for tourism development created 'competition for land' between the local authorities and local people. This competition was also due to the implementation of the Compulsory Land Acquisition Act 1960, which gave local government the right to acquire land from local villagers for 'development.' Since nearly the whole of Langkawi was gazetted as Malay Reserve Land, which meant that the ownership of the land was not to be transferred to non-Malays, this compulsory land acquisition affected many Malay villagers. It forced local authorities to develop strategies to acquire land and local villagers to attempt to retain their land. I discuss this in chapter 1. The government used the laws and regulations as a tool to justify their actions while local people use their own 'arguments' to retain their land. The differences in interests created conflict between the two sides. It was during these struggles that the association between land and identity emerged. Many scholars have discussed the interpretative relationship between stories, land and identity (see De Carteau 1984). On Langkawi, land acquisition gradually increased the awareness of local people of the importance of having

land and their deep attachment to it. Its importance is based on their identity as Langkawi people, as portrayed by the inheritance of land by their descendants. It was anxiety for their future and that of their descendants, which changed Langkawi people's attitude towards land and turned it into a symbol of security for future generations.

The ownership of land became a means of securing the 'sense of belonging' for present and future generations. Therefore, its loss was the same as losing their sense of belonging as Langkawi people. In other words, land became a symbolic means of maintaining their identity. As one local man argued, "How can one be called a Langkawi person if one does not have land." Having land was therefore another way of acquiring the 'right' to being a Langkawi person. In chapter 2, I describe how the threat of land acquisition boosted Mat Saman's long struggle to prevent his land from being taken by the government, which had continued for nearly eight years. Interestingly, during that difficult time, he managed to set up his own chalet, which was built on the 'disputed' land. Forbes (1999) argues that struggles over land rights are struggles over the relationship between identity and the land. He maintains that the analysis of this relationship should take into account who owns the land to which identities have become attached, how claims are being contested, and how these systems of tenure are being transformed.

Anthropologists have described how land, as a result of tourism development, has taken on a new symbolic importance (McKay 1987). McKay has described how the changed attitude of the local people of Negril, on the West Coast of Jamaica, is expressed by their deep attachment to their land and how they identify themselves according to their area of origin. Neumann (1995) argues that continuing political-economic transitions in Tanzania have profoundly altered the politics of wildlife conservation tourism and have markedly restructured the terrain of power in the decades-old conflict

between local land rights and state-directed wildlife conservation. Wilson (1973) points out that owning a piece of land is perhaps the single most important factor in the preservation of a man's identity (1973: 46) and general attitudes to the Caribbean. And this sentiment has produced the institution of 'family land' (Besson 1979), with leasing rather than selling to protect the remaining land. Land on Langkawi has also become a symbol of security for future generations (see Clark 1966). By retaining their land, the islanders can leave it on to their children, to secure a place for them and prevent their expulsion from Langkawi.

Distinction and Modernity

Bourdieu has argued that 'distinction' is defined by the interrelationship between different classes. These classes are characterized by certain lifestyles through the 'mediation of habitus' (1979: 279). In my thesis, I have used the concept of 'distinction' to explain how Langkawi people distinguished themselves from outsiders (*orang luar*), which has become highly significant since the arrival of tourists and other outsiders on Langkawi. The island should not be seen as a locality consisting only of local people. There were also other people living there (although temporarily) for their work. They came either from other states in Malaysia or from neighboring countries. Langkawi people consider themselves separate from outsiders, who are distinguishable by their dialect and dress.

The distinction between 'outsiders' (*orang luar*) and 'insiders' (*orang sini*) became increasingly important owing to the massive influx of tourists and other outsiders. People from the mainland were mainly civil servants, businessmen or hotel employees, whereas most of the people from neighbouring countries were hotel employees. The distinctive categories of *orang luar* and *orang sini* with their different

values and activities, were frequent topics of everyday conversation particularly in discussions of the effects of the changes on Langkawi.

In local terminology, local people were categorised as Langkawi people (*orang Langkawi*), or more literally, 'people of this place' (*orang sini*). *Orang sini* referred to local people who were born on Langkawi, people who had migrated to Langkawi and had lived there ever since, or those who were born on Langkawi of immigrant parents or ancestors from other states or neighbouring countries (see Carsten 1997). According to Carsten, marriage and sharing were ways of being accepted as Langkawi people or *orang sini*. As a result, the differences between these people were becoming difficult to identify as they became similar to local people. Langkawi people saw themselves as village people represented by sameness, similarity and relatedness (Carsten 1997). Therefore, they did not see themselves as the same as outsiders for they did not share their local activities, and they had different values and practices, thus creating this distinction. For Langkawi people, *orang luar* referred to people from outside the island, who could be instantly recognised by their dialect and style of dress. Local people often used the phrase "I can tell" when asked how they differentiated between *orang luar* and *orang sini*. Therefore, the islanders simply classified these people as 'outsiders', which could also mean 'strangers' (*orang asing*). Those who originated outside Langkawi, but already considered themselves to be local peoples would assert that they were born in such-and-such a place but had 'become Langkawi people' (*dah jadi orang Langkawi*).

However, on many occasions, it was not only local people who distinguished themselves from outsiders; the latter also distinguish themselves from local people, especially those who knew that they were only temporary residents on Langkawi. In fact, outsiders would avoid being identified as *orang sini*. They would often introduce themselves as, "I'm not of the people of this place, I'm an outsider" (*saya bukan orang*

sini, saya orang luar). Most of these people came to Langkawi to join husbands or wives employed as civil servants. The fact that they were only temporary residents and had no intention of staying permanently on the island made them think of themselves as *orang luar*. Many of them rented houses or rooms owned by local villagers to be nearer to their workplace. In the village where I stayed, many of the local villagers' houses were rented out to young hotel employees. Most of them were young men and women although there were a few families who also rented houses in the village.

Although the outsiders might have frequent contact with local villagers living nearby and go to the same local shops and restaurants, the division between the two categories was quite marked. Such minimal interaction was obvious when local people would say "I don't know them, they must be outsiders," whenever they happened to see them. These were the outsiders who often became the point of reference for Langkawi people making such distinctions.

Tourists were normally called *pelancung* and there were two types: domestic and foreign. Domestic tourists were often called 'tourists from here' (*pelancung sini*) or 'our tourists' (*pelancung kita*). Malay tourists were sometimes referred to as *pelancung/orang kita* (people like us) or *orang luar*, whereas domestic tourists of Chinese and Indian ethnicity were simply referred to *pelancung kita*. Foreign tourists, particularly those from Europe were called *mat saleh*,¹⁵ white people (*orang putih*) or sometime Western tourists (*pelancung barat*). Tourists from other countries were normally described according to their nationality, for example, Hong Kong tourists, Japanese tourists, Indonesian tourists, etc.

¹⁵ A term normally used to refer to European people and widely used not only on Langkawi but also in Malaysia generally.

In chapter 4, I describe how tourist activities were mostly separate from local villagers, therefore resulting in minimal interaction. However, local people realised that tourists came to Langkawi not to 'gaze' at them but to experience the 'sea, sun and beaches'. Therefore, a tacit agreement was made between them: "As long as they don't disturb us, we won't disturb them." In chapter 5, I describe how local villagers became defensive when accused of drinking alcohol and taking part in 'social' activities. They argued that those activities were mostly indulged in by outsiders.

However, it is suggested here that the distinction between Langkawi people and outsiders seemed to be very fluid and constantly shifting, particularly in meeting the islanders' aspirations to become 'modern.' The distinction seemed to be less emphasised when the local people compared themselves with city-dwellers, 'people from Kuala Lumpur,' who, also outsiders, were the point of reference for becoming *moden*. Kuala Lumpur was viewed as the centre of modernity. Langkawi people wanted to be seen as having the ability to be like 'people in Kuala Lumpur' in terms of material possessions and 'taste.' Local people trying to fulfil their desire to become *moden*, distinguished themselves from others by the possession of *moden* goods, which also symbolised 'having a lot of money' and being 'rich' (*kaya*). The young people distinguished themselves from their elders by the bold public display of branded clothes, new cars and mobile phones. They contrasted themselves with others who could not own those objects. It was revealed then that being *moden* was more closely linked to local images than to Western images.

I maintain that on Langkawi the new patterns of consumption should be seen as the local people's attempt to show the ability to possess *moden* objects rather than to be identified as members of a certain group of class. However, I am not trying to imply that Langkawi community comprised only one homogenous group of people. The emergence

of local entrepreneurs, for example, created a separate category with a higher economic status than other local villagers. The islanders were classified themselves according to their main source of income or occupation, such as *kerja kerajaan* (civil servant), *kerja sendiri* (self-employed) or chalet operator (*peniaga chalet*). However, it is maintained here that this categorisation did not indicate deep divisions among local people. Rather, their efforts to maintain their similarities were manifested by their strong attachment to the local community and their constant insistence of 'we as village people' or 'we as Langkawi people.' The economic gap created by the emergence of new local entrepreneurs was subtly erased by their active participation in the local community and the membership of local women in the Women's Institute (WI).

As I describe in chapter 7, instead of detaching themselves from the local community, this new category of local entrepreneurs became strongly attached to it. The similarity of local people as 'village people' was described by one of the local entrepreneurs as follows: "Whether we are chalet operators, businessmen or civil servants...we're still village people, we still live in the village. Whatever we do, people will see...so we have to be careful." Besides, the re-establishment of the WI in the village emphasised this similarity when the membership was open to all local women. Waldren (1996) argues that in Deia, Mallorca, the influx of tourists, seasonal visitors and foreign residents (outsiders) has increased local people's sense of place, a consciousness of local distinctiveness, preserving their sense of identity and solidarity. This sense of solidarity, Waldren argues, is the product of the people of Deia's relationship with outsiders.

On Langkawi, however, the desire to be seen as 'up-to-date' or *orang KL* by having the same taste and style, did not imply that Langkawi people wanted to resemble outsiders. It should be mentioned here that local people still viewed themselves as

Langkawi islanders, who were different from 'outsiders.' I suggest that the increasing desire for certain 'modern' products was perpetuated by the arrival of outsiders displaying the latest in fashion and material possessions, provided that local people had access to these new products in their locality, as described above. This created 'enthusiastic imitation' by Langkawi people. Gell (1986) has described how the concept of 'prestige goods' was imposed on the Muria by outsiders and perpetuated by a marketing system that was entirely in the hands of non-Muria, who were considered by the Muria to be socially superior. Gell also argues that consumption among the Muria people was the demonstration of adequacy and the ability to come up to the collective mark. In contrast with Langkawi people, the consumption of 'prestige goods' in Muria were sought after not because of intra-village competition to be the most fashionably dressed but because all the villagers alike were attempting to live up to a particular collective image and express conformity, not originality nor individuality (ibid. 121).

Modernity, Consumption and Negotiation

The fact that tourism and development often occur hand in hand means that it becomes impossible to distinguish which has the greater effect on modernity. However, many cases have shown how this can happen simultaneously. There have been substantial studies documenting the effects of modernity in Southeast Asia (Ong 1987; Mills 1997). In tourism development, Dogan (1989) has described the different forms of adjustment to tourism development and 'coping with tourists' (see Boissevain 1996). On Langkawi, local people developed various strategies to negotiate tourism. They did not simply identify tourism as a source of moral decadence, for they argued that the rise in moral problems was not due to the 'demonstration effect' of foreign tourists as had been often asserted (cf. Bird 1989).

I show in chapters 2 and 3 how the tourist activities were totally separate from the local villagers. Local villagers were quite angry at the insinuation that they created most of the social problems. However, instead of foreign tourists being accused, other outsiders were partly blamed for the influence resulting from their mixing with local people at work. Nevertheless, the islanders also argued that social problems should be seen as a sign of the lack of faith (*kurang iman*) among local young people. Having strong faith (*kuat iman*) was often associated with the awareness of shame (*malu*). Since negative values were inevitably brought with outsiders, Langkawi people started to employ strategies to deal with these influences by using religious references such as 'lack of faith', which I describe in chapter 5. They pointed out that the answer to those problems was strong faith (*kuat iman*). Since tourists were an asset to the local economy, they should not be held responsible for the increase in these problems on Langkawi. Rather than blaming tourists, one should deal with these problems by 'coping with one's own *nafs*' (desire) and not solely by 'coping with tourists' (see Boissevain 1996).

This 'coping with one's own *nafs*' required a strong *iman*, (faith) which should be built on a strong foundation of Islamic law. It was revealed that the local people's Islamic belief played a big role not only in their dealings with outsiders but also in their participation in local tourist services. Their Islamic faith and their identity as *orang Islam* was the constant subject of reference, debate and negotiation to enable them to play an active part in the local tourist industry. Langkawi people were making a very careful analysis of the values and perceptions to select those which could be changed and those which should be maintained. This selection was not an act of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) but an act of conscious choice, rationalisation and justification. In other words, it promoted self-reflexivity. Waldren's work (1996) has described how the people of Deia on the island of Mallorca learned to incorporate change due to tourism development by selectively maintaining those traditions that could be adapted to the new requirements.

They could balance a sense of tradition with modernity and enjoy the advantages of modernisation, which itself revived a respect for traditional values and customs. Therefore, local people will always be making selections in order to adapt to change.

The arrival of modernity due to the development of tourism on Langkawi was inevitable. Tourism was a gateway for the influx of new products, which previously were available only in cities. These new objects such as cars, mobile phones, branded items and fashionable clothes were given a new meaning by Langkawi people, in which the ownership of these products symbolised being *moden*. The availability of these new products and the islanders' aspirations to become *moden* explained why 'having one's own money' was desirable. In chapter 6, I describe how Langkawi people dealt with the new patterns of consumption.

It was revealed that the practice of being *moden* referred more to what Schien (1999) coins the 'performance of modernity' that is, the bodily display and ownership of those *moden* objects. Schien argues that being modern should be thought of not only as a context in which people make their lives, nor only as a discursive regime that shapes subjectivity, but also as powerfully constituted and negotiated through performance which can be seen in "myriad negotiations of cultural politics" (ibid. 361). I discuss the view that the possession of these objects was associated with the concept of being 'rich'. This 'performance of modernity' did not necessarily refer to the West but more to local practices which had created the discourse on alternative modes of modernity that was distinct from and parallel to the Western model (Ong 1990; Appadurai 1996). Schien (1999) also emphasises that people do not live increasingly similar lives under modernity, rather that their lives can sometimes become increasingly different owing to the potential of media consumption and geographic mobility. Instead of more dispersed and proactive cosmopolitan impulses, he asserts that people everywhere increasingly

“seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (ibid. 4). Being *moden* as manifested by wearing fashionable *baju kurung moden* and headscarves which depended on the type of material, colour, design and pattern did not indicate that Western dress was not desirable to Langkawi people. In fact, it was the combination of the two, but to become *moden* for local people is the ability to be as *moden* as Kuala Lumpur people (*orang Kuala Lumpur*) rather than using ‘white people’ (*orang putih*) or Western people as their point of reference.¹⁶

In chapter 6 I also discuss how the sudden change availability of new goods and the intensity of desire to become *moden* increased the importance of having ‘one’s own money’. This is shown by the increase of Langkawi women in wage employment, although the jobs are often seen as low skilled. Norazit (1996) argues that the quest for a modern identity, like that of their urban and affluent peers, drove the Malays of Lorong Sembilang to work. On Langkawi, the desire to have waged employment was to have ‘one’s own money’ for this would give them a different autonomy. The autonomy of ‘managing money’ and ‘spending money’ is also discussed. However, the inability to maintain this new image pushed some Langkawi people into financial debt.

New ‘Class’ Formation

It has been argued that the emergence of the middle class in Malaysia was due to the implementation by the government of the National Economic Policy (NEP) (Kahn 1996a; Sloane 1999). The NEP, formulated in 1970, was designed to help modernise Malay

¹⁶ Brenner (1996) has shown that the adoption of ‘veiling’ and fashionable Islamic dress by Javanese women in the face of modernity in Indonesia, reflects the deepening of religiosity rather than advancing secularisation, and it not only challenges the Western model of modernity but also the local traditions.

society, by creating a modern Malay middle class. I argue that the participation of Langkawi people in tourism-related business, particularly chalet entrepreneurship, produced a group of local business people. Again the emergence of Malay entrepreneurs was heavily dependent on government projects and business scheme loans. However, can these entrepreneurs on Langkawi be considered a new middle class?

Scholars have discussed the emergence of the middle class in Malaysia, focusing upon the development of Malay elite groups in cities (see Saravanamuthu 1989; Kahn 1996a). They generally analyse the definition of the middle class, its identity and composition and its impact on local communities. Kahn argues that the differentiation between middle class and the proletariat should not be based on the qualification of “ownership, either the owners of skills and/or qualification” (1996a: 22). I approach the emergence of this new ‘category’ by examining its participation in business in the village. Rather than describing this new category as a new middle class, it would be more accurate to define it as what Kahn refers to as the ‘Not Quite There’ group. In chapter 7, I argue that instead of forming their own group and distancing themselves from local people, these new entrepreneurs were seen to be more attached to the local community by their support for local activities (cf. Gooberman-Hill 1999). The differences in type of business and income sources did not cause a separation of the new local elite from the local community (cf. Errington & Gewertz 1997). This is because they had not forgotten their obligation to ‘give back’ to the local community. This increase in self-consciousness and concern for their own people was also due to their exposure to outsiders and the fact that they still lived in the same locality, side-by-side with other local villagers which made them still consider themselves *orang kampung*.

I argue that the differences in sources of income created different categories of income sources in the local community. The government employees were normally

referred to by local people as *orang kerja kerajaan* (civil servants) or *makan gaji* (salaried staff), while entrepreneurs were generally described as *kerja sendiri* (self-employed). This distinction was based on the fact that civil servants received a fixed salary, whereas entrepreneurs had a 'flexible' income, depending on the type of business that they operated. The entrepreneurs were often perceived by local people as 'rich' or 'having a lot of money.' However, this distinction seemed to be softened owing to their social activity and interaction with the local community. Although sometimes they tried to display ostentatiously their 'degree of affluence' through with their brand-new cars, this should not be taken as an indication of their efforts to distance themselves from the local people. On the contrary, they were strongly attached to the local community, and played an active part by holding high positions on local committees.

The Women's Institute, which was re-established after a few years' inactivity is the best example to describe how differences in income sources or type of income sources were not significantly emphasised. Its non-exclusive membership brought local women from different economic backgrounds to share the same activities, be they shopkeepers, restaurant managers, or the wives of doctors, chalet operators or fishermen. This ideology of 'sameness' or similarity (cf. Carsten 1997) can be expressed by *gotong royong* in WI activity, which became the powerful symbol that characterised the concept of sharing and equality. This *gotong royong* activity, became the main element of WI activities, showed how social status and material evidence of class had become irrelevant. The activity emphasised equality and it was evidence of harmonious and communal relations between members. It can be suggested here that local women, by taking part in WI activities, played an important role in playing down the economic differences of their husbands.

Although local people referred to the local business people as *usahawan* (entrepreneurs), the business people often identified themselves as simply *orang kampung* (village people) and *orang Islam* (Muslims). This phrase was frequently used to emphasise their status of *orang kampung*, no matter what their occupation or business. As *orang kampung*, they should portray certain characteristics such as humility, simplicity and readiness to help. They felt that they had a strong obligation to negotiate local values and often related their negotiation to 'what the *orang kampung* would say.' They realised that in facing business challenges, particularly in tourism, they have to negotiate and adapt Islamic values. However, they maintained that anything that was not acceptable in Islam was not negotiable.

Having said all that, I am not trying to imply that there was no distinction at all in the local community, although perhaps it is still too early to see its effects. However, this may change in a few years' time when the distinction between entrepreneurs and the local community has become more marked. In chapter 7, I argue that the first generation of local entrepreneurs may not accurately fit the definition of middle class. However, the second generation might well be on the same level as their urban peers as the result of the parents' efforts to groom their children by sending them to local college or university to gain business qualifications. The improvement in the level of education and business skills and the changed pattern of consumption might widen the gap, between the 'business class' and the rest of the community.

Nevertheless, this will depend on the level of the economic development of tourism on Langkawi, which has become the main catalyst of the emergence of local business people. If local tourism continues to develop, it will provide more business opportunities for local people and create more local entrepreneurs on Langkawi. Until this happens, the effects of class distinction or the formation of a new class in the local

community remain to be seen. The detailed account that follows is about how the people of Langkawi engage themselves in a negotiation process in responding to tourism development on the island.

Chapter 1

The Development of Tourism on Langkawi

Nash argued that any study of the impact of tourism should take into account the larger social and historical contexts in which it was embedded (1981). Following his point, this chapter provides a general overview of the federal and state government's approach to tourism planning and, in particular, the direct role of the federal government in the development of tourism on Langkawi. It is also the purpose of this chapter to draw attention to the significance of the declaration of duty-free status, which was used by Langkawi people to mark the beginning of the era of rapid development initiated by the federal government. Following this, a more detailed account of how individual local people think about and conceive development is presented. Their own explanations and narratives clearly show their response towards the local tourist industry, which I discuss throughout this thesis.

Tourism Development Theories and Regional Development Plan

The contribution of tourism in stimulating economic growth has been widely acknowledged (William & Shaw 1988; Kean 2000). In Third World countries, tourism is viewed not only as a tool for development (De Kadt 1976; Cater 1987) but also as another form of modernisation (Harrison 1992). In Southeast Asia, tourism has a long history, particularly in areas such as Bali and Java where it has existed since the 1930s. The growth of tourism in Southeast Asia has coincided with other political/economic changes that have taken place in this region. It represents an attractive and relatively 'soft' means of promoting development (Hitchcock 1993; Richter 1980). Despite widespread argument about the socio-cultural impact of tourism (Smith 1989; Wood

1979), the industry has helped to introduce economic activity into areas, which hitherto have been economically marginal and spatially peripheral. In Southeast Asia, tourism has become the leading source of foreign exchange in Thailand, the second largest in the Philippines, and the third largest in Singapore. In Indonesia it has moved into fourth place, outstripping rubber and coffee as an earner of foreign exchange in 1990 (Hitchcock 1993). Owing to this contribution, many countries have responded in various ways to enable them to participate in the process.

The discussion on the theoretical aspects of tourism development is still limited in tourism literature. Nevertheless, there are several studies and reviews on tourism development theories have been done by borrowing theories from outside the field of tourism studies (Opperman 1993; Miossec 1976; Butler 1980). First let me discuss several theories on tourism development before proceeding to the discussion on the debate in development theories.

It is argued that tourism development is developed based on three stages: development stage or the diffusionist paradigm (Butler 1980) and dependency (Husband 1981; Britton 1982). The notion of unilinear change is underlies the development stage theory. According to Miossec (1976), the development of tourism starts with one resort, then leads to the development of other resorts and at the final stage, tourism is distributed almost evenly across the country. The first resort to be developed will lose their appeal and tourists will begin searching for a new destination. The hierarchy of resort within a country will declining and replaced by new resorts (Opperman 1993: 537). Another types of visitors populate the resort.

The diffusion theory maintains that at one point during development "there will be a spread or a diffusion of development impulses from the most developed to the less

developed area” (Browett 1979: 65). By establishing growth poles, it can be used effectively to eradicate poverty. These can either be whole cities or just an economic sector, which is thought to contribute to the economic growth of the particular area.

Rostow’s (1960) theory of ‘stages of economic growth’ has been used to explain this perspective. His theory, which suggests five levels of economic development, has been used by Schlenke and Stewig (1983), who relate them to the development of domestic tourism. In tourism development, they have argued, the number of local people participating in domestic tourism increases. At the final stage of ‘high mass consumption’ all social groups can afford to participate. In the area where tourist development has been most intense, there will be more extensive and expensive facilities have taken over by transnational companies, leaving the smaller and less profitable part of the market to local entrepreneurs. However, Miossec’s model was criticised by Pearce (1989) who argues that tourism development is typically occurs “within an existing socio-economic structure whose some forms of urban hierarchy and transport network are already found and not an empty space” (Pearce 1989: 18).

In contrast, dependency theory views tourism as similar to any other industry, which is used by developed countries to perpetuate the dependency of the developing countries. Instead of reducing the existing socio-economic regional disparities within the developing countries, tourism reinforces them with its ‘enclavic structure’ and its orientation along traditional structures.

The development of tourism in Langkawi has actually been based on the process of diffusion of development with its aim to spread development from the most developed areas to the less developed areas. This approach was taken by the Malaysian government, which suggested tourism as a means of introducing economic activity into

economically depressed areas, such as in eastern Peninsular Malaysia, especially the coastal states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah (Hitchcock 1993). The development of Langkawi was part of this policy to encourage economic development of regions that were experiencing low productivity or low income compared with other regions. Not all regions shared equally in the nation's economic development, which was largely focused on the west-coast states of Peninsular Malaysia. As a result, these states are much more advanced in their infrastructure and economic development.

The Debate on the Theory of Development

The growth of tourism in developing societies has come with controversy. Promoting tourism also means embracing greater integration into the world economy. It is this direct economic and political effect from this integration that creates controversy. Two issues dominate tourism development debate, that is, growth and redistribution. The debate over the political economy of development has particularly significant during the 70s and early 80s and the most debated of development theory is modernisation versus dependency approaches. Tourism studies were also immersed into this larger debate between these two theories. Since then, little has change theoretically within political economy treatments of tourism but today there are more explicit emphases on either modernisation or dependency perspectives.

Modernisation theorists viewed development as a linear process, with many poor countries simply 'behind' their wealthier counterparts (Clancy 1999:2). It focuses on the process of Westernisation whereby internal structures of 'developing' societies become more like those of the West, allegedly by emulating development patterns. Economically, they are in the midst of shifting from agriculture to industry or traditional to modern. It is argued that if investment capital, entrepreneurial skills, technological

knowledge and values necessary for modernity are absent from societies which are developing, then it can be diffused from outside or sufficiently powerful indigenous change agents to act as catalysts and guide the rest of the community with them (Harrison 1992:9). Previously, there existed a broad optimism that economic growth would coincide with political democracy. However, later a view has emerged where modernisation was seen as accompanied by a significant period of societal transition and the potential for unrest if crucial social and political institutions were absent.

In contrast, dependency theorists argued that poor societies generally had experienced negative consequences related to colonialism. Dependency writers argued that development was not a linear process but instead more holistic (Burns 1999:3), where wealth and poverty were intimately linked on a global scale. Therefore greater economic integration would only lead to greater poverty and misery. However, there is also arguments that international trade and the power of foreign investors were identified as structures and agents of dependency which both were viewed as inhibiting national development or at least threatening national control over the development process.

The economic benefits associated with tourism trade have been especially emphasized not only by policymakers but also academicians. These benefits include employment creation, foreign exchange earnings, income and employment multipliers (Leas 1988; Pearce 1981). Tourism was cited as growth industry, expanded faster than other international output and trade. However, these ideas have been criticized by dependency theory inspired critical studies of tourism in developing countries. Britton (1982: 332) was the first to associate tourism with dependency, arguing that it had to be integrated into larger "historical and political processes that determine development". Others argue that its economic benefits were always overstated, job creation is seasonal

and more capital intensive (Turner and Ash 1976; Crick 1989; Lea 1988, Nash 1977; Wood 1979).

I argue that development can bring modernization to a community though it does not necessarily mean that the community has to go through the process of 'westernisation'. In this case, modernization is more referring to the development that could bring new technologies, new infrastructure and entrepreneurial skills into the community. In the context of Langkawi, tourism has indeed become a development tool in generating local economic growth. Langkawi is undoubtedly being 'modernized', in the sense of being incorporated into international tourism. Tourism development has indeed given opportunities for local people to diversify their economic income. Local people have gradually shifted their economic activity from 'traditional' activity to tourist-service businesses.

Whether or not the Langkawi Structural Plan, which is based on the "Tourism First" approach, has been successful in delivering development in Langkawi through tourism, depends on how development is defined which I will discuss in the later section. The first and the main objectives of "Tourism First" approach are to locate suitable sites for the development of resorts, hotels and other tourist attractions. It is underpinned by the idea that the centre of tourism is the development of a level of infrastructure (Burns 1999). From the "Tourism First" perspective, the word 'development' is referring to a site/project development that would attract a higher number of tourist arrivals. This approach has been criticised for the lack of real access for the local community to the planning process because most of the decision-makers are strongly influenced by developers/planners and politicians. If the plan is implemented appropriately, it can maximize positive return to community. While wealth creation or development is viewed as possible under this new structural plan, lack of guidance or the

inefficient in implementing the plan would distort the local economic growth and would benefit only small portions of community. The local government still needs to monitor the implementation process and to ensure that local interests are protected. Otherwise, the statement that is often used by the local government and policymakers that tourism development is 'for the benefit of nobody else but local people' is just rhetoric of development.

Langkawi Tourism: Background and Development

The state of Kedah lies in the northern region of Malaysia, together with three other states: Perlis, Penang and Perak. Kedah was an example where tourism had been identified as one of the primary strategies in implementing the federal government's policy on regional planning. It was hoped that the infrastructure introduced alongside tourism would benefit local communities and assist the process of modernisation.

The potential of the island as a tourist destination was 'discovered' by two famous political figures in Malaysia, both of whom originated from Kedah state and both of whom became prime minister of Malaysia. They were Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Malaysian Prime Minister, who was also known as the 'Father of Independence', and Mahathir Mohamad, the fourth and current Malaysian prime minister. Tunku Abdul Rahman was the twentieth child of Sultan Abdul Hamid, the twenty-fourth ruler of Kedah. After graduating from Cambridge in England, he returned to Kedah in 1931 and was appointed to the Kedah Civil Service. In 1934, he was sent to the Island of Langkawi as the first Langkawi District Officer (Sheppard 1995: 32). In his autobiography, Tunku described Langkawi in 1930s as follows:

[It] consisted of a group of picturesque islands, thinly populated, sparsely cultivated, without roads and the object of a legendary curse whose term of seven generations was thought not yet to have expired...The island was isolated and lacked all the amenities one normally took for granted, no crops appeared to flourish. There was no jetty there, although small coastal motorboats from Penang and Kuala Kedah called daily.

(Sheppard 1995: 65)

As he began his job as District Officer in 1934, he oversaw the construction of a new jetty and several roads. He also collected the old legends and initiated a search for the grave of Mahsuri, a young woman who was executed by the Chief of Langkawi during the seventeenth century, an event, which became a famous local legend. With a public donation, Mahsuri's grave was rebuilt with white marble and an inscribed headstone. His initiative had impressed S.W. Jones, the acting British Adviser, who persuaded the council to transfer him to the District Office of Sungei Patani, the second most important district in the state of Kedah.

In late 1969, Tunku, then prime minister, visited Langkawi Island again to survey the area for possible tourism development (Jasin 1987).¹ At that time, Langkawi was still relatively isolated and barely accessible from the mainland. To reach the island, one had to go to the Kuala Perlis jetty and ask for a lift from the fishermen to the Kuah jetty. The journey would take about three hours, depending on the wind and current. At that time on Langkawi, there was a government rest house, a sanatorium, and a hotel above a coffee shop for visitors who had no relatives to provide accommodation. However, Tunku's role in developing Langkawi was limited to the construction of a hotel by the late millionaire Low Yat, which was then sold to the TDC (Tourism Development Corporation) owing to lack of customers. Tunku's desire to develop

¹ *Berita Harian* 9 April, 1987.

Langkawi was eventually continued by Mahathir Mohamad, the current prime minister. Mahathir, who had served as medical officer on Langkawi Island from 1956 to 1958, was always concerned with its level of development. He began taking a practical interest in modernising the island after he was selected as deputy prime minister in 1976 (Ismail 1995: 28).

On his first visit to Langkawi as deputy prime minister (6 December 1976) Mahathir Mohamad took a survey flight around the island to find an area that might be suitable for tourism. Then, in 1983, a local company was given a contract by the government to carry out a tourism development project in that area. Unfortunately, the project was a failure owing to the recession of 1985/86. However, it has been reported that small-scale tourist services on Langkawi had actually existed since the 1930s. The first hotel in Langkawi was said to have appeared in 1938 in the main town of Kuah, and was run by the local Chinese (Din 1988). My informant, Pak Ali, told me that in 1959, there were only about thirty shops in Kuah town, owned by the local Chinese and a few Malays and Indians. Pak Ali, who had spent several years on Langkawi as a soldier, recalled that there were so few people on the island that one could even lie down and go to sleep on the road. The villagers had to cycle or walk to Kuah town for shopping or to attend to any administrative matters.

However, in the early 1980s, inspired by the tourists who preferred a quiet spot by the seaside, a few villagers began to build chalets on the beaches away from the urban center, especially along the west coast of the island. With help from the government scheme and a credit loan (MARA),² a number of villagers began to follow in the footsteps of the other local chalet operators. At this time, the government began to

² *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA) is one of the government trust agencies entrusted with the management of public funds. It has been very active in training and creating young *Bumiputera* (son-of-the-soil) entrepreneurs by organising business management courses.

recognise that the tourism industry had the potential to expand and become one of the primary strategies for reducing regional disparities and accelerating growth in underdeveloped regions. In 1984, the first announcement was made that Langkawi was to be developed as one of the major tourist centres of the country (Tenku Idris 1996). A local company was chosen to build seven hotels with an expected total of 2,500 rooms.³ For this proposed development, 1,000 acres of land on Langkawi was leased by the state government of Kedah to the company. The federal government realised that to transform Langkawi into a major island resort, it needed foreign investments to boost tourism there. Therefore, changing Langkawi into a duty-free port would increase foreign investment, as had happened on Penang Island,⁴ another tourist destination not far from Langkawi island. To achieve that aim, the federal government declared Langkawi a duty-free port by the Financial Act (No. 2) of 1986, effective from 1 January 1987. By 1988, a year after the declaration, there were eleven Malay entrepreneurs operating a total of more than a hundred rooms on the island (Din 1988). This initial stage of development on Langkawi witnessed the emergence of local Malay entrepreneurs in local tourism.

Prior to 1990, the development of Langkawi was the responsibility of the local town council and District Office. Initially, Kedah was divided into two institutional regions: MADA (the Muda Agricultural Development Authority) and KEDA (the Kedah Regional Development Authority). MADA covered most of the northwest of Kedah while KEDA, established in 1981, encompassed nearly 75 per cent of the state in an attempt to correct the disparities between MADA and non-MADA areas. However, the role of KEDA in the development of Langkawi was reduced when the Langkawi

³ *Malaysian Business*, 1 September, 1984.

⁴ Duty-free port status supported many localities such as Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong in their development. However, Penang's duty-free port status had been removed by the federal government in the early 1980s and Labuan became the only duty-free port in the country before Langkawi was declared in 1987.

Development Authority (LADA) was established in 1990 to act as a promotion agency and development co-ordinator for the island. LADA, which became one of the three institutional regions in Kedah state, had jurisdiction over the whole of Langkawi. The formation of LADA was the first attempt by the government to ensure a well-planned and systematic development of the island. As a statutory body, LADA was given the following authority:

1. to facilitate, stimulate and undertake economic and social development in the designated areas;
2. to promote and stimulate the designated areas as tourist destinations and duty-free areas; and
3. to promote, stimulate, facilitate and undertake the development of tourism and infrastructure as well as residential, agricultural, industrial and commercial development. It was agreed between the government, federal and state, that every development project on Langkawi must be approved by the LADA authority.

(Tenku Idris 1996: 95)

Besides the above roles, LADA was responsible for preserving the natural environment during development. To these ends, the Langkawi Structure Plan 1990-2005, had been prepared by the state government of Kedah to guide development in Langkawi, and so far, billions had been pumped by private investors into island (Tenku Idris 1996).

An intriguing point about LADA, in comparison with MADA and KEDA, was that it had been put under the authority of the Ministry of Finance. The direct power of the federal government was brought to bear through LADA, under the direction of the finance minister and Tun Daim Zainuddin, the ex-finance minister and economic adviser to the Malaysian government. The prime minister's interest had become the driving-force behind the rapid development, for bureaucracy had been reduced to a bare minimum. The most recent manifestations of Mahathir Mohamad's desire to modernise

Malaysia was 'Vision 2020'. The main objective of this plan was for Malaysia to 'become modern' in the twenty-first century. For Mahathir Mohamad, Langkawi had been touted as the 'symbol of Vision 2020' because of the huge efforts that had been made to develop the island (Ahmad Sarji 1993). The high level of power and participation of the PM was clearly reflected in a statement made by the General Manager of LADA:

He [the PM] sets the standard, determines the deadlines and provides the inspiration. And it has been proved that when he determines the deadlines, things can be done. If you're not going to listen to number one, who else will you listen to?"

(Tenku Idris 1996: 121)

In fact, one local officer said to me, "Everything has to be done when Mahathir wants it. Just do what he wants." The prime minister's personal intervention reflected the power that the federal government exerted on the planning process on Langkawi.

Declaration of Duty-Free status: 1987

The development of tourism on Langkawi can be considered deliberate and large-scale. The year 1987 became particularly important for Langkawi people because it was closely associated with the 'arrival of development' (*kedatangan pembangunan*) on the island after the declaration of its status as a duty-free port. Local people saw the declaration as a significant event and inseparable from the beginning of the development era. Many local people explicitly stated: "Development started to arrive only when the government changed Langkawi's status to that of a duty-free port." The fact that many huge development projects were begun and the basic infrastructure was improved after the change of status made it easy for Langkawi people to pinpoint 1987 as a watershed, to describe this year as the time when 'real' development finally arrived on the island.

This was the general response that I received from my informants when asked about the gradual changes on Langkawi. As a duty-free port, Langkawi enjoyed freedom from excise duty and service taxes, and all goods imported into the island from foreign countries were also free from custom duties and sales tax with the exception of petroleum and petroleum products, cement, marble, anchovies and rubber (Tenku Idris 1996: 94).

Under the Fifth Malaysian Development Plan 1986-1990, more than RM 500 million was spent on developing the infrastructure and another RM 374 million was provided for similar development under the Sixth Malaysian Development Plan. Out of this, RM 147.7 million was channelled into development through LADA,⁵ RM 35.34 million was spent on the construction of new roads and the upgrading of existing roads, RM 9.2 million on a massive sewerage project and RM 33.46 million to establish a water supply and distribution system for Langkawi.

Since 1987, the capital of the island, Kuah town, had been given a facelift and numerous duty-free shops had been opened there. Furthermore, this island's infrastructure had been developed including new jetties and roads. Electricity and a sewerage system were installed, the airport was upgraded, highways and a telecommunication system were built, as well as a hospital with new high-tech facilities to provide a good health service for local people. The number of schools and private colleges was increasing, which made education accessible to local young people. It was only in 1987 that a number of the old roads were upgraded and new roads were built to connect Kuah town to all areas of Langkawi. A 6 feet wide road, which was built in 1967, was widened to 20 feet (Darus 1991). In 1980, another road was also built to link Kg Senang and Kg Indah, which was previously accessible only by sea, and several

⁵ *North Review*, 1995 p. 19.

single-track roads (5 feet wide) were also built across paddy fields to link several small villages. The increased number of ferries has reduced the gap between the island and the mainland. There had been always contact with people from the mainland but not as frequent as today with the development of transport. It was also in 1987 that the government started to introduce a piped water supply, whereas previously, water was drawn from wells for daily chores. Now, people could have an indoor water supply instead of having to fetch it from a well, which was usually situated some distance away. These days, almost every household has a telephone and mobile phones are becoming popular among local people. Electricity has enabled local people to install electrical goods such as televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, rice cookers, blenders and other kitchen equipment.

Before the promotion of tourism in the 1980s, there were many discussions and interpretations of the lack of development on Langkawi. The media and also some academic scholars often portrayed the island as deprived of economic development. Din (1988), for example, described Langkawi before tourist development as carrying the stigma of isolation, with a reputation of being a ready 'Siberia' for dissident elements within the state administration (ibid. 16). Another described Langkawi as a deserted island which have become known as "the period of sleepy hollow," since it was unable to retrieve its glorious past for a long period (Tenku Idris 1996: 99). The Malaysian prime minister also acknowledged the lack of development and the huge effort to 'bring development' to Langkawi when he was asked why he took such a radical step for the island. He said that it was a huge and courageous task if Langkawi was to be developed, for it has long been left out of the development programme. However, the gradual changes in physical development marked 1987 as the year of 'the arrival of development.' The villagers realised that they were living in a period when great

changes were occurring. Some of them remarked that they were living in the 'development era.'

Although local people claimed that 'development' arrived only in the late 1980s, historians have argued that Langkawi people did not live in economic isolation prior to that time. It has been stated that since the very early modern period history has shown the openness and adaptation of Southeast Asians to outside influences (Reid 1993). In fact, it has also been stated that Malay society has been subject to change throughout history. Gullick (1987) describes how the acceleration of social change in Malay society, which began in the twentieth century, has continued to the present day. He points out that during those period Malay villagers in Kedah imported basic commodities because local production was not adequate to satisfy local needs. Kedah villages bought and sold goods for money and lived in an exchange economy. In fact, Reid (1993) argues, the 'early modern era' in Southeast Asia generally began in the fourteenth century, long before the arrival of the European fleets. He states that Southeast Asia played an important role as a trading post during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as a result of global economic expansion (ibid. 2). During this period, this region was most affected by the rapid Chinese and European commercialisation. It was also a time when marked changes in belief and cultural systems were observed.

Historians have argued that the stagnation on Langkawi during the early 1920s could also have been the result of the global economic recession (Subwannathat-Pian 1989). Ismail, a local historian, pointed out that the lack of development during the early 1920s on Langkawi was nothing unusual. He said that those years were in the pre-independence era, when even mainland Malaysia was barely developed, never mind a remote island like Langkawi (Ismail 1995).

Be that as it may, because Langkawi was one of the poorest districts in Kedah state in the early 1970s and had an unfavourable image, the government's decision to develop the island in the early 1980s was accompanied by much public fuss and media coverage. The development of Langkawi had suddenly become a public discourse. It became a political issue when it was asserted that before Langkawi had been developed as a tourist destination, no one had ever taken any interest in it including the ruling political party (Jasin 1987). However, the declaration of duty-free status, politicians began using the development issue for their political speeches on television and in the newspapers. Langkawi people heard constantly of the 'development' that the government asserted was benefiting Langkawi people. Most of the newspapers' reports described how fortunate the islanders were since the arrival of development. They were advised to not forget 'their roots' with the arrival of 'sudden luxury' and were encouraged to grab the opportunity to play an active part in local tourism. Despite all the encouragement, the massive plan to develop tourism on Langkawi also provoked various comments and criticisms from local people, who asserted that they were not being informed about the decisions and that the government's decision to declare Langkawi a duty-free port was too drastic. They described the rapid development on Langkaw as being beyond their expectations.

Development Debated: Local Concepts of 'Development' and Conflicts of Interests

Tourism has been viewed as another form of modernisation and has meant greater integration into the world economy and created opportunities for movement by the population into the 'modern' sector from 'traditional' subsistence agriculture (Clancy 1999). The economic benefits include the creation of employment, foreign exchange earnings, government revenue, and income and employment multipliers (Diamond 1977; Lea 1988). Conversely, many studies have also questioned the supposed benefits of

tourism, arguing that frequently the multiplier effects are overstated, for instance, job creation is seasonal and more capital intensive than was once believed (Lea 1988; Wood 1979). It is argued that the analysis of economic benefits have to be integrated into a larger 'historical and political process that determines development' (Britton 1982: 332). Despite the economic importance of tourism, debate continues as to whether it truly benefits all the participants. Two issues dominate this debate: growth and redistribution (Burns 1999). The critique of tourism as a developmental agent for non-industrialised countries has been put forward by the development sociologist De Kadt (1976), whose book, *Tourism: Passport to Development?*, was produced in response to growing unease about the nature of tourism's economic benefits. Tourism as a tool for national development has been termed a 'development first' approach by Burns (1999). There is no general agreement on what development is nor how it should be carried out. The success of a project in delivering development through tourism depends on the definition of development.

Gardner (1997) has interpreted development as a mode of thinking and a source of practices, which have been produced and reproduced within particular historical, political and economic contexts. Development requires a relationship between specialists, developers and the developed – the people who are at the receiving end. This relationship comprises power structures and hierarchies, which are socially constructed (Escobar 1991). Since it requires a set of relationships, development is "at best a dialogue, at worst the imposition of a set of ('our') processes and beliefs on the 'other' " (Kaufmann 1997: 107).

The contradiction between what local people *want* from 'development' and how the government thinks the 'development' should be carried out, has become the basis of conflict between the two parties. Din (1996) acknowledges these different views. He

points out that from the host community's point of view, 'development' often refers to the realisation of the local area's full potential. This potential is based on the goals that the community members share and aspire to achieve. Din (1996), who has undertaken research on the local participation in tourism development in Langkawi, argues that any tourism development that displaces or marginalises the original host community is more of misdevelopment than development (ibid. 9). However, he argues, the Malaysian government's point of view is to develop tourism so that it can contribute towards the economic development of the nation. Hall (1994) points out that the state has its own interests and values to pursue, and will at times impose these value preferences even when they are in contrast with others that exist within the society.

Although tourism comprises relationships with various people including tourism planners and local residents, the different aims and goals have often meant that local people have been ignored when planning decisions have been made. The industry is often criticised for decisions that are imposed on the local population by government, outside groups or planning bodies (Keogh 1990; Timothy 1999) in the name of 'modernity', economic growth and a thousand other slogans. Din (1993) has noted the lack of participation when local people are assumed have little knowledge about planning decisions. He argues that the public is often assumed to be apathetic, partly because of its own ignorance of the subject or partly because of its lack of familiarity with the procedures involved. However, in the case of Langkawi, he asserts that the technique used by the government in gaining a response from local people about tourism planning was ineffective (Din 1993).

There are two schools of thought regarding the role of tourism in the community. The fatalistic approach, view tourism as an exploitative force, in which residents of a tourist destination have little say in its development (Lea 1988). The functional view

sees tourism as a proactive force. It suggests that if the industry is developed appropriately, it can maximise positive returns to the community and minimise the environmental and cultural cost. It suggests that all parties – stakeholders⁶ – participating in the business within a particular market or system should collectively manage the tourism system (Freeman 1984; Truly and Leisen 1999). This ‘collaborative effort’ among autonomous key stakeholders is necessary to resolve planning problems and development issues (Jamal & Getz 1995). Recent tourism literature emphasises the need for increased participation by everyone in the proposed development (Keogh 1990; Jamal & Getz 1995). However, the interaction between these stakeholders often creates a hierarchy. Escobar points out: “The encounter between, say, peasants and development experts is socially constructed, that is, structured by professional and bureaucratic mechanisms which are anterior to the encounter” (1991: 667).

Different People – Different Perceptions

The creation of various relationships in the development of Langkawi had a marked effect on local people’s perception of the tourist industry, which could be reflected in their opinions on ‘development’. Seers (1979) argues that the concept of development is something very normative which requires value judgements. It is therefore important to recognise that individuals’ definitions of development often vary internally (Gardner 1997). Gardner shows that one ‘development’ project means different things to different people but maintains that these different understandings are not separated but constantly influenced by one another. The meanings given to development are often mixed and continually shifting. The fact that local people have different ideas of what development should be means that their perceptions of local tourism development also become very

⁶ Tourism stakeholder includes tourism planners, local businesses, residents, activist groups, tourists, national business chain, competitors, government employees.

subjective and relational. It has been acknowledged that such perceptions are very ambivalent, contradictory and sometimes paradoxical (see Wilson 1997). These complexities and the existence of different groups of people in a local community have shown that perceptions of tourism development are not monolithic.

In Langkawi, 'development' is called *pembangunan*. To find out Langkawi people opinions on tourism development, they were asked to give their personal definition of it. They were asked to talk about their experience and knowledge of it. The significant feature of local people's perceptions of 'development' was the language that they employed. Various perceptions were described in their use of different terms and words. The choice of words and arguments reflects their different aims and also the state of their relationship with the local authorities. The responses also reflected personal experiences and the role played by individuals in local development.

When I asked what development meant to them and what it meant to be developed, many local people responded by pointing to characteristics such as infrastructural improvements, the increased number of new hotels, shopping centres and the arrival of outsiders on Langkawi. They referred to the introduction of new infrastructures such as a road system, electricity, piped water, telecommunications, all of which gave them a comfortable life in comparison with earlier times, now described as 'before the arrival of *pembangunan*.' Having undergone a difficult life to earn a small amount of money to bring up her family, Rokiah gave a rational viewpoint of the necessity of development:

Fifteen years ago, our lives were so difficult...there was nothing; everywhere was still forest. Today Langkawi has changed...it's developing. There're a lot of hotels...before there were only 10 or 12 motorcars but now the number is rising.

Hashim, who was an ambitious young man, saw development as a path for him to follow and fulfil his desire to become an entrepreneur. Having postponed his plan several times owing to lack of capital, the government's new incentive had helped him to realise his dream:

Since the government brought 'development' to Langkawi, more people come to Langkawi...more business opportunities to try. It's up to individuals to choose whether to take them or not.

However, some saw development as a class-oriented process which associated development with the process of acquiring more material goods although this was not overtly articulated. It was the acquisition of more material goods which they focused on when they referred to local people who became wealthy. There were individuals who had become 'instant millionaires', having a brand-new car and a new brick house (*rumah batu*), and people who had mobile phones. For these people, development was about having a lot of money expressed through the ability to engage in conspicuous consumption.

Awang's understanding of 'development' was influenced by his new status as *Orang Kaya Baru (nouveau riche)*.

When development 'arrived', land prices suddenly increased whereas previously land was of no value at all. I was lucky to have several acres of land. I sold some of it. Now I have a new house, have been on the pilgrimage, and I send my son to a college outside Langkawi. Development is good.

This contrasts with Suffian's understanding of development, which emerged from his experience of being a religious officer and the village's imam. The rapid development

made him realise the importance of spiritual development. He seemed to be very concerned about a group of local youths who were indulging in 'immoral' activities and he argued that economic development should be accompanied by spiritual development.

Unlike Suffian, Muaz's view of development was heavily influenced by his legal training and experience of how easily people could be fooled owing to lack of knowledge. He argued that development should include the guidance and education of local people. He acknowledged the important role played by development in providing local people with basic infrastructure, but also realised the effect on those groups whose rights over their own land had been denied. For him, development was supposed to give benefits to local people. He argued that if it was not of benefit to the people, then it should not be called development.

Osman, having been forced to leave his land and business and with only a vague idea about his future, had views on development which reflected very much his political leaning and his relationship with the local authorities. The feeling of conflict with the authorities was, in his words, 'very strong'. He was sceptical about the way a certain policy had been implemented. His experiences have drawn him to view 'development' as no more than jargon used by the government and politicians to justify the local authority's action in taking his land. In his mind, development should bring security for his children and should provide people with a better quality of life, not make their situation worse. As he put it,

It is not so much a question of 'no development' or anti-development', but what the people want and how this should be met.

People knew that they were expected to make some sacrifice for development, but the main question was the degree of sacrifice that was necessary to justify the government's

action. As one local man who had had to sacrifice his land said to me, “I’m ready to sacrifice [my land] for a public facility project, but is it worth sacrificing my land for a golf course which only benefits a few rich people?”

The above examples show how local people had different views of development. They confirm that Langkawi people’s understanding of development was the result of an interaction between their personal experiences, their aims, technical training and political interests. These different understandings of development and the tendency to class distinction based on income sources loosely divided the Langkawi community into several categories. There was the group of local people who argued that development did, to a certain extent, benefit them by changing their socio-economic status, either directly or indirectly. They tended to compare their current economic status with that of a few years back, and thus used it as the basis in evaluating development on Langkawi. In other words, the evaluation of the impact was in reference to their own lives rather than to the local community in general. This group comprised local people who were mainly employed as low-skilled workers in restaurants, supermarkets, hotels and recreation centres. They realised that their low level of education would not enable them to gain higher wages.

For these people, the addition of several hundred ringgits could make a great difference to the family income, since the parents did not have to support their working children and would focus only on the other children who were still at school. In many instances, working children would help their families either by contributing to the household expenses or by paying school fees for their younger siblings. These people argued that their socio-economic change was attributed to development, which offered them a variety of jobs. These job opportunities were not only for young people but also

for older women. The increased opportunity to earn extra income for their families had influenced their perceptions of tourism development.

In contrast, another category of local people asserted that development did not benefit their lives at all: "We are still the same as before." Furthermore, the increase in the cost of living had made their lives harder, since they have to spend more on basic necessities. They preferred to be in the previous situation where it was more quiet, peaceful, safe and not crowded. However, this was only a small number of informants.

The critical debate on the benefits of 'development' was more prevalent among those local people who were government and private sector employees and also local entrepreneurs. This group of people was more concerned about the future generations. Their argument centred on the question of what current development would bring Langkawi people in the next ten years. They never disparaged the role of development in bringing changes, to a certain extent, in the livelihood of Langkawi people but at the same time, they were very sceptical about the direction of development on the island.

The above categories show the different meaning of 'development' as perceived by local people. Their different perceptions were apparently influenced by the emergence of class division that was gradually becoming significant owing to the differences in income earned by local people. However, regardless of the diversity of perception, it can be suggested here that local people seemed to share the view that development was about improvement: improvement of income sources, class position, spiritual, economic, physical and welfare development. This view is parallel to Seers's argument (1969) that development was a normative concept and maintained that development was about improvement of 'absolute necessity', which refers to level of poverty and unemployment. He pointed out that if these were improved, then this could

be called a period of development for the country. If one or two of these problems grew worse, then it was not developed.

However, the significant fact about the local people's perception of development on Langkawi was that the majority of them seemed to agree that it was attributed to the government decision to promote tourism on the island. One local man said to me, "If it were not for tourism, the government would not develop Langkawi." Local people realised the important role played by government and acknowledged the prime minister (PM), or simply referred to him locally by his first name, Mahathir, as the prime mover. They argued that such rapid development might never have happened if the PM had not been Mahathir. One villager told me, "Had the PM not been Mahathir, he [the PM] would have developed another area and Langkawi would have just developed very slowly, not as rapidly as today." Mahathir was often described as being very sentimental towards Langkawi for he was *anak jati Kedah* (Kedahan born). As a result of Mahathir's intervention, one man said to me, "This [development] is all his [Mahathir's] work" (*ni semua kerja dia*).

In the case of Langkawi, the main issue was not so much whether Langkawi people had to choose between development or not development because they needed development. Burns (1999) pointed out that most societies and countries had a desire for material wealth and social improvement and it was something of a *non sequitur* to assume that such aims could be achieved without impact or sacrifice. On Langkawi, local people were aware that they had to make certain 'sacrifices' for the sake of development. This approach was in contrast to the assumption that local people were anti-development.

The controversy about the cost and benefits of tourism will undoubtedly continue. Tourism development in Langkawi was very much influenced by the development policy imposed by local government on local people. Therefore, it is not the question of whether tourism does not work or is inherently damaging; rather, tourism development is heavily reliant on the local government and local authorities. I emphasise here that the perception of development is based on how people experienced it. Therefore, it is more useful to examine different people's experiences, discuss their goals and what they want from development (Kean 2000). The rest of the chapters in this thesis focus on 'tourism as an experience'. They are about conflict, negotiation, self-reflection and the adaptation of Langkawi people to local tourism.

Chapter 2

Land and Tourism

In this chapter, I examine how the compulsory acquisition of land has heightened the awareness of Langkawi people of the importance of owning land. The development of tourism, which has increased the demand for land, has encouraged the local government to implement the Land Acquisition Act to acquire land from local villagers. The fact is that local villagers have already occupied many of the strategic places, such as coastal areas, which often become a target for tourist development. Therefore, the implementation of the Land Acquisition Act has become very problematic. The need for land for tourist development and the need for land for local villagers have produced competition for land between villagers and the local authorities, in which conflict seems to be inevitable. Such a conflict has also been documented in other developing countries (see McKay 1987; Kearney 1995).

The threat of land acquisition implemented by the local authorities has produced anxiety and fear among local people about their future. In this chapter, my aim is to show how this anxiety about their future lives and those of their children has gradually changed their attitude towards land. During the initial stages of tourism development, many people on Langkawi were eager to sell their land, tempted by the offers of money that they had never dreamt of having in their entire lives. However, the effect of land acquisition on the people concerned made them begin to realise that land, which was previously in abundant supply, would become a scarce asset. This realisation made them begin to see the importance of having land and making an effort to retain it. I argue that the change in attitude towards land was its gradual association in the minds of the people of Langkawi with their identity and its recognition as a symbol of economic security.

These perceptions were markedly strengthened during the local villagers' struggle to prevent their land from being taken over by the local government. The villagers argued that they wished to maintain their land for future generations, "it is for our children and grandchildren" and as a symbol of their sense of belonging to Langkawi Island.

Firstly, this chapter will investigate how this land acquisition produced conflict between the local people and the local authorities in which LADA, the local agency responsible for monitoring development on Langkawi, became the target of strong resentment from the villagers. It is suggested here that the implementation of the new structural plan and new land act led to a drastic 'reorganisation' of the local administration system. The people of Langkawi claimed that this new law, which they found very confusing, had been exploited to a certain extent by the authorities. This discourse has therefore witnessed the islanders' apprehension about the fate of future generations and indeed heightened their appreciation of the value of their land. Instead of seeing land as an asset, which previously did not generate any economic income, today the perception that it is a symbol of both wealth and their 'existence' in the local territory is strongly manifested by local people.

To demonstrate precisely how this occurred, I shall begin by giving a historical synopsis of land acts, types of land title and the status of land on Langkawi Island. I shall also discuss how the status of land, which has been adversely affected by the new law implemented by the state, has become the main reason for conflict between Langkawi people and the local authorities. Next, I present the ethnography of how a group of local people were losing their land and the long ordeal that they had to undergo to prevent it from being completely taken over by the local authority. Next follows a section that shows the influence of the political power of the federal and state governments on decisions regarding development on Langkawi Island.

Federal and State Governments and LADA

The development of tourism on Langkawi Island is indeed a product of State government central planning. In fact, it is the result of close co-ordination between the federal and state governments. On Langkawi, the federal government helped to accelerate the growth of tourism by the establishment of the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), a corporate body falling directly under the Ministry of Finance.¹ This means that the annual expenditure for Langkawi development is channelled from the Ministry of Finance, the state government and various other sources to LADA.²

LADA is under the chairmanship of the former Malaysian Finance Minister, who is also the Economic Adviser to the Malaysian Government,³ and the Chief Minister of Kedah State. The other members of the board of directors of LADA include the Representative of the Treasury, the Director of Land and Minerals of Kedah State, the General Manager of LADA and the Local Representative of Langkawi (*Wakil Rakyat*). It is the Director of the Land and Minerals Office who is responsible for acquisition of land in Kedah State, including Langkawi Island. Therefore, it appears that one of the highest authorities in LADA is also the person who controls capital allocation and land issues on Langkawi.

The close co-operation between the federal and state governments is also due to the personal interest of the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. He was lauded as the international promoter of various international events to be held in Langkawi in order to attract tourists to the island. His interest in Langkawi's development was manifested by his frequent visits to the island to monitor personally its

¹ See Langkawi Development Authority, *Annual Report 1996*.

² Under an act of Parliament, LADA is allowed to raise funds by borrowing from financial institutions to meet its obligation (Tenku Idris 1996: 120).

³ In 1998, he was elected by the Prime Minister as a Special Minister (*Menteri Tugas-Tugas Khas*) while the Prime Minister also became the new Finance Minister, replacing the dismissed Deputy Prime Minister who was the ex-Finance Minister.

progress. The Prime Minister's influence in hastening development on Langkawi and his powerful relationship with LADA are described by the General Manager of LADA:

He [the Prime Minister] sets the standard, determines the deadlines and provides the inspiration. And it has been proven that when he determines the deadline, things can be done. If you are not going to listen to the number one, whom else will you listen to?

(Tenku Idris 1996: 121)

Furthermore, the close relationship between the prime minister and the Chief Minister of Kedah was due not only to the fact that they were both born in Kedah also that its Chief Minister of Kedah knew exactly how to realise the prime minister's vision of the development of Kedah State. Regarding development on Langkawi Island, the Chief Minister said: "the PM does not need to tell me anything because I am his loyal follower. I know what he wants."⁴ Such close collaboration at central and local levels indicates the serious interest of the highest authority in the development of tourism on Langkawi.

Five-Year Langkawi Structural Plan: Its Implementation

The declaration of Langkawi as a duty-free port and the federal government's plan to develop the island as the main tourist destination in the region have put pressure on the state government to prepare a structural and systematic development plan. In 1988, the local council (*Majlis Daerah*) was given the responsibility to devise a structural plan for Langkawi and in 1991, with the co-operation of foreign expertise, a five-year Langkawi Structural Plan (LSP), was finally approved by the state government. This plan whose main purpose is to develop tourism, has outlined the policies and criteria with which any future development on Langkawi should comply. It is a fact that much land is needed to

⁴ MASSA, May 1997

build a public infrastructure such as a new road system, airport, residential area, etc. Following the Langkawi Structural Plan, a detailed plan of development for certain zones of Langkawi was also devised, which was based on 'focused development' (*Tumpuan Pembangunan*).

The state government's decision to develop tourism in Langkawi gradually attracted investment from outsiders, particularly from big companies, politicians and corporate figures.⁵ The result was a dramatic increase in land prices, particularly along the coastline and in the town area, which were ideal for tourist development. Even though the Evaluation Department was responsible for setting the guidelines for estimating land prices, the actual selling prices were often higher than the value stated. Prior to the declaration of a duty-free port, land on Langkawi had little monetary value. Hence, much of it was left unattended as the younger people migrated to the cities to seek better job prospects. However, the inflation in land prices, which reached hundreds of thousands and even millions of ringgits per hectare, obviously encouraged local people to sell their land to the extent that it became a concern to the Prime Minister.⁶ It was reported in the local newspaper that the prime minister advised the people of Langkawi not to sell their land for fear of being exploited by land brokers.⁷

In implementing development projects as outlined in the Langkawi Structural Plan, a total of 1815.0 hectares of land was estimated to be needed for a residential area to accommodate government servants and workers from outside Langkawi and for other institutions such as schools, hospitals, recreation centres, hotels, chalets and agriculture.

⁸ It is claimed that another 1231.1 hectares are still needed for future development until

⁵ *Elit Melayu Bolot Beli Tanah*, Utusan Melayu, 8 November 1989.

⁶ *Utusan Malaysia*, 5 February 1989.

⁷ The STAR, 7 October 1989.

⁸ Langkawi Structure Plan, 1992.

the year 2005. In 1987, before the LSP was devised, about 12 hectares of land had been taken by the local government, and between 1986 and 1987, ⁹ 1414 cheques were given to the local landowners in compensation. Even though the government seemed to have no alternative but to reclaim several areas of coastal land, the further acquisition of land in the coastal area and around a number of local village is still inevitable. ¹⁰

In order to acquire this land, the Land Acquisition Act (1960) was implemented and then amended in 1990, stating that any land would be taken by the government for the purpose of "development." Hall (1994) has pointed out that the state government has its own interests and values to pursue and will at times impose regulations and laws that will contradict the interests of the local community. He also argues that the state is capable of sustained purposeful action across many areas of social activity, of which tourism is only one (ibid. 20). In the description below, I shall show how this law, which is also applicable to any privately owned land, has been used and how it has led to the displacement of a group of local villagers on Langkawi island.

Patterns of Land Ownership

In the peninsular Malaysia, there are three components of land tenure, which have been defined 'the system of rules and procedures, which grants access to, and use of land resources and the legal processes, which enforce these rules,' (Hooker 1972). Land tenure consists of a traditional system of land tenure (*adat*), Sharia law, and legislation founded in British colonial law. The latter was extended after Malaysia gained independence.

⁹ Special Research Report 1989, p. 97.

¹⁰ It is reported that nearly 400 hectares of land will be reclaimed for resort development project which includes RM1 billion floating village and a golf course on one of the coastal areas on Langkawi (*North Review*, 1995: 4)

In pre-colonial times, there were two types of land ownership, land owned by the aristocracy and land owned and operated by the peasants. In agricultural land tenure in Malaya, land ownership involved two types of rights, proprietary rights of owners and the usufructuary rights of farmers. Proprietary rights came only after a long period of settlement. The Malay ruler of each Malay state had a nominal ownership of land but Malay peasants generally had usufructuary rights and had access to all land that was not cultivated by others. Malay customary law recognized only usufructuary rights, which were then held as long as the land was occupied and payment (1/10 of the crop) was given to the Malay ruler or Raja (Courtenay 1995). There was no social or religious basis to defend the right to any particular piece of land (S.Husin Ali 1972:103). The Raja also had rights on abandoned land, which was known in Kedah as *tanah raja* (Raja's land).

Although it is difficult to determine the origins of cultivation system in the Malay peninsular, it is clear that rights to land have evolved from agricultural systems of shifting cultivation. A peasant could always move to a new land or to another territory that was under different chief in order to get more peace or security. Therefore, the concept of land ownership was very loose. The ownership of a holding can be terminated under the State Land Codes if paddy or country land is left uncultivated for three consecutive years. Since land was easily accessed, land in Peninsular Malaysia was not generally regarded as a private property and a form of wealth that could be inherited from parents (Amriah 1993: 162).

However, perception of land changed after traditional land law was modified and then replaced by the land law imposed by the British colonial government. During the British colonial era the traditional system of land tenure was regarded as unproductive in the development of capitalist agriculture (Idris 1988). Therefore, the government

introduced a European concept of land as a commodity to be exploited for its commercial value. Colonial land policies were formulated which confined peasants' applications for land to certain localities and provided plenty of land for capitalist planters. Land rights were transferred from the state ruler, as the holder of all land rights, to individuals in several forms, from temporary occupation licences to title with full rights in perpetuity (Courtenay 1995: 36). This new system was first introduced in Selangor in 1891. In effect, this new system attracted much foreign ownership of land and therefore prohibited the Malays, as local indigenous people, from having access to land. According to this law, Malay peasants no longer had freedom to open up new land, which they were accustomed to under the traditional Malay land tenure system. Previously, under the traditional Malay land tenure system, any Malay cultivator could open up new land and it would eventually become theirs so long as they maintained cultivation and paid a certain amount of tax.

According to this law, which was adopted from the Torrens system, all occupied lands had to be examined and registered and every Malay landholder would be issued a certificate of title. In addition, the landholder was required to pay premium and annual quit rent in order to maintain the land title. Land had to be formally applied for under the colonial administration and the complicated procedure deterred from applying for more land. The colonial authorities then created institutions such as Land Offices, courts and District Offices to implement and reinforce these laws. Although there was resistance to this law in 1928, it was successfully suppressed by the colonial government (Idris 1988). This system was repealed and finally replaced by the Malaysian National Land code in 1965 which is the basis of modern land rights and which still retains the principles of earlier systems.

During the colonial era, the establishment of private landownership attracted European planters and miners to invest in the development of plantation agriculture and mining. The shortage of labour in the mines and on the rubber estates led the British to import workers from India and China. This private landownership had a tremendous impact on the Malays, who were mainly living in the rural areas as farmers and fishermen. Much land transferred into the hands of non-Malay moneylenders and businessmen. Gradually the Malays became separated from the other communities since there was no attempt made by the colonial government to integrate them (Andaya 1982: 136). The Malays' resentment resulted in strong public protest, which forced the colonial government to pass the Malay Reservation Enactment in 1931.¹¹ According to this act, any Malay Reserved Land (*Tanah Simpanan Melayu*) could not be transferred, sold or mortgaged to non-Malays. However, it could be taken and used by the state government for government projects such as building basic infrastructure.

The transfer of rights to land upon the death of the original owner (inheritance) has traditionally been governed by the practices of *adat* and the Islamic inheritance law. In Malay society, two systems of *adat* are recognized, that is, *adat perpateh* and *adat temenggong*. *Adat perpateh* is restricted to the state of Negeri Sembilan and to parts of Malacca. It was brought to this area in the middle of 17th century by a group of people from the Minangkabau district of Sumatra. *Adat perpateh* assumes a kinship principle of matriliney in which ancestral property is vested in the female members of the clan while *adat temenggong* implies the existence of a bilateral kinship system.

¹¹ Ridzuan (1987) argues that the introduction of this law by British officials was to create Malay villages and affected only land with economic potential. Most of the land declared was inhabited by the Malay villagers, and included forest and mountains. See also Abd. Rahman (1979) on the purposes of the British in implementing the reserved land Act.

Adat law is considered as an informal system which emphasizes the equal inheritance between men and women while Islamic inheritance is more formal and based on Islamic rules (Carsten 1997). Carsten has acknowledged the complexity of these two sets of rules in the process of inheritance in the Malay community in Langkawi island. It has been widely argued that Islamic laws of inheritance can cause an excessive fragmentation of land. A parcel of land would become uneconomical when it is subdivided among several heirs and each of them now owns the smaller part of the whole lot. This fragmentation has become one of the factors that lead to the problem of idle agricultural land. Idle agricultural land is "arable plots of land which have been issued titles but were not cultivated for three consecutive years. It also refers to land with temporary occupation licences which are not cultivated, and titled agricultural land equipped for double cropping but are used only for single-cropping" (Amriah 1993:151). This problem, which faced the majority of Muslim communities, has become a post-independence phenomenon in rural Malaysia (Amriah 1993: 152). Apart from that, the relationship between the Malay Reserved Land status and development also seems to have been very problematic from the day the Act was passed and continues to be so after 41 years of independence.¹² It is this relationship, which has created the dispute between the local authorities and the Langkawi islanders. To understand this dispute, one needs a clearer understanding of the land system on Langkawi Island.

¹² It has been reported that more than 800,000 hectares of land have "disappeared" and fallen into the hands of nonMalays for development (*Berita Harian*, 9 March 1983). Ridzuan, in fact, argues that secret agreements among the owners of the Reserved Land to lease their land have been made since the 1920s (ibid. 2). Amriah, however, argues that Islamic law of inheritance, which encourages the continual fragmentation and subdivision, has deprived the Malays of the opportunity to participate in the capitalist economy (1993: 162).

Land Inheritance Practices in Langkawi

In 1933, all the land on Langkawi Island was gazetted as Malay Reserved Land (*Tanah Simpanan Orang-orang Melayu*), except that which was under private ownership or was mortgaged to non-Malays. Therefore, some of the land on Langkawi owned by non-Malays was in the Malay Reserved area. It has been noted in previous studies that the majority of the Langkawi islanders were originally migrants from nearby areas on the mainland and also from southern Thailand (Carsten 1997: 263). One of the main reasons for the migration was economic, that is “to earn a living” (*cari makan*), to open up new land (*buka tanah*) or to seek property (*cari harta*) (ibid. 265). At that time, Langkawi people claimed, there was still much empty land, which they could open up and from which they could earn a livelihood. They just chose a suitable area, cleared the land, built a *dangau* (a wooden or bamboo hut for shelter) and began to cultivate crops. Land ownership could be obtained by registering their land for land title (*geran tanah*) with the local Land Office. Usually, registration was granted only after a long residence in a particular area or several years’ cultivation. A land title gave the owner legal rights over the land so that he or she could sell it or it could be inherited by the children.

In Langkawi, the process inheritance is still based largely on the two systems, Islamic inheritance rules and the informal system of *adat*. The process of inheritance based on these two systems also involved a complex and subtle articulation of *adat* and Islam (Carsten 1990). Previously, land was important for Langkawi people because land could be used to produce money. Land was used to grow paddy, fruits or vegetables which villagers could sell to generate money. Carsten argues that the main motivating factors behind migration of people to Langkawi were poverty, warfare on the mainland or shortage of rice land (1997:14). Langkawi Island was a chosen destination for outsiders because land was still in abundance in Langkawi. People needed land to

cultivate rice, fruits and vegetables because it was the important source of their income. Since much of the land on Langkawi was Malay Reserved Land, the Malay villagers could also apply for the Temporary Occupation Land (TOL), which was obtainable from the local Land Office. The TOL was a licence for the temporary occupation of land, and was issued by the state government through the local Land Office to local villagers who were interested in using the land for either agricultural or commercial purposes.

According to the National Land Code Act, Section 65(1), the land granted would be taken from any state land, mining land or reserved land, which for the time being was not in use.¹³ The licence fee, which was to be paid annually, would depend on the area of the land and its usage. A higher fee was charged for commercial activities than for farming, and the licence would be terminated on the death of the licensee. The main difference between private land and TOL land was that the local government had a right to repossess the TOL land whenever it was needed without paying any compensation to the licensee. Nevertheless, the occupier of TOL land could obtain legal ownership by applying for a land title. If there was sufficient proof that the applicant was fully utilising the land for either agricultural or commercial purposes, a land title could be granted to him or her by the Land Office. In 1989, about 30 per cent of the land on Langkawi had been developed for agriculture, 7 per cent comprised villages and the majority was still owned by the state government (104,581 acres).¹⁴ Out of that area, only 25,059 acres were under private ownership while the rest was forest reservation (74,280 acres), agricultural land (91.5 acres), federal reservation (68.9 acres) and other reserved land (36.1 acres). About 129,640 acres on Langkawi are Malay Reserved land, out of which 459.1 acres had been approved as Temporary Occupation

¹³ National Land Code Act 1963.

¹⁴ Langkawi Land Office Special Report 1989.

Land (TOL). By 1989, 11,382 acres of land had been given to Langkawi people: and 62 per cent under private ownership and 38 per cent under temporary ownership (TOL).

Although local people could apply for land titles, the process often took several months or even years. The difficulties of travelling to the Land Office, which was located in the town, made it impossible for them to enquire about their land title applications. Hence, there were Langkawi islanders who were still holding TOL licences and were powerless to prevent the local authorities from taking their land because they had not obtained their full legal rights over it. One local man told me about the difficulties in following up one's application: "At that time it was not as easy as today to go to town to ask about the process...no one bothered to ask." Furthermore, since there was no pressure from the local authority nor threat to their land status, obtaining legal private ownership ¹⁵ was therefore not of great importance to the local villagers as long as they could still cultivate their land. They did not expect that the delay in registering their legal rights would put them in conflict with the local authorities. This is not to imply that the local villagers had little interest in land; rather that they had never realised the importance of these land titles in determining their future.

Before the development of tourism, paddy cultivation and fishing were the main economic activities of Langkawi people. Since there was no irrigation system for paddy cultivation in Langkawi, local villagers had to rely heavily on seasonal rain. Local villagers therefore had to cultivate one single crop per year. Initially, local people had no desire to own more land than what they needed for subsistence. The amount of land owned and operated by the family was restricted (S. Husin Ali 1972: 104). There was no

¹⁵ In Peninsular Malaysia, Wickman (1985) points out that each extended family or household within a family generally established exclusive farming rights to the land which they cleared and that these rights would be passed on to the heirs in perpetuity. So, there was no basis for holding or transferring a legal title.

incentive to work extra land and furthermore there was no market for the surplus. Extra land needed additional labour, which usually came from the family.

In Langkawi, most of local villagers owned rice fields, of not more than ten acres. This also means that they had uneconomic agricultural plots. Due to the out-migration of rural youth, the land was left in the hands of old people. These old people could not manage to perform physically demanding tasks. Land preparation was usually slow and arduous, transplanting and harvesting were tedious and required heavy demands on labour while threshing and winnowing were time-consuming. Furthermore, tenant operators would receive half of the income because they had to share it with the landowners. There were several local villagers who became tenant operators when landowners gave permission to these local villagers to work on their land. These tenant operators were usually related to the landowners.

However, since paddy cultivation was just a seasonal activity, this has forced local people to find an alternative income by working in service sectors. Today, paddy cultivation has become a source of part-time income. Many villagers grew paddy not so much for the purpose of making extra income but 'for the love to land' (*sayangkan tanah*). This new phenomenon has led to a great deal of land in Langkawi becoming idle. The obvious interest of young villagers in working in tourism rather than in the agricultural sector emphasizes the contrast between what they viewed as 'traditional' and 'modern'.

The decision to leave agricultural occupations commonly taken by younger adult members of a household was because the alternative income guaranteed them a greater financial stability. Amriah argues that the lack of interest of younger people in work in the agricultural sector is also related to the image of small-scale agriculture in the post-

colonial era (Amriah 1983). Agricultural occupations are often associated with traditional work, low and unstable income. The making of this negative image occurs through the continual emphasis on academic achievement, which means that employment in white-collar occupations symbolizes success (1983: 27). White-collar jobs would secure a stable income and ensure social mobility. In Langkawi, working in the government sector or business sector has become a channel for local people to perform their modern identity and to enable them to become members of the new 'middle class'.

Changes began to occur after the development of tourism when the monetary values of land increased and therefore general land prices increased on the island. While several local people began selling part of their land to gain money, many other local villagers started to own more land as they began to see the importance of land in generating income and wealth. Land became very limited and the ownership of new land can now only be made through purchase. For the purpose of development, the local government has acquired many acres of land. Furthermore, the increase in land prices has made it too expensive for local people to purchase.

However, today land itself is considered as money or capital. Although many Langkawi people seem to have less interest in working on their land, they have begun to see the importance of owning land. Land would still generate income although it was left idle. Having land is like a form of investment because the longer one keeps it the higher its value. Land is not only important as a source of economic but social advantage. Before tourism, the ownership of land did not symbolize any social status. As Carsten was told, "there were no big landowners, there were not really poor or very rich people, everyone had about the same and they were all similar" (1997:267). She argues that the emphasis on equality is very strong because of the fact that 'fishing does not entail the

entrenchment of economic differentiation through the inheritance of land which is a prominent feature of mainland agricultural communities' (1997:17). Carsten further argues that Langkawi people's perceptions of themselves as 'poor people' was based on the 'absence of large landholdings, and the fact that most villagers were engaged in small-scale fishing without significant property' (ibid: 17).

However, today land has become an important social indicator of the level of wealth of a particular individual. Local villagers categorize people on the basis of ownership of land and other property. With more land, a higher income is possible and this give access to a better lifestyle. This status can be further strengthened when those who have land can afford to have a car or several cars, new modern houses and can go on a pilgrimage. A person who has the title *haji*, a title gained after the pilgrimage, is often looked up to, especially in a village community. In Langkawi, many local villagers used their money from the sale of land to build a new house, to renovate their house or to make a house extension or to buy new cars or motorcycles. However, only those who have ready cash or assets tend to buy more land. These people are usually those who have extra resources or already have a large amount of land. They are often viewed as *kaya* (rich). This wealth has become one of the indicators of the emergence of class in the local community. All these changes are linked to increased values of land in Langkawi due to the development of tourism.

Previously, the process of land division took several years after the death of the original owner. One of the problems was the reluctance to divide property because it often induced conflict among siblings and between relatives. Carsten (1990) has noted the sensitivity of local people in this issue of land inheritance. Even though this conflict in property division still occurs today; local villagers claimed that property has to be divided as soon as possible to avoid any deeper conflict in future. One local man told me

that once the land was divided, this would give more freedom to those who inherited it to make future plans for their land.

However, I have discovered several cases where villagers would lend their land to their children to be developed by their children but only for business purposes. In this case, the land would only be used for their children to set up business but this did not involve any transfer of land title or division of land. The land title would only be granted after the death of the owner. One local man who gave permission to his three adult children to use his land for a chalet business told me that he only lent the land to his children (*bagi pinjam*) but had not given the land title yet.

The children would jointly set up and manage the business that was built on the loaned land. They share the business but each of them has their own role in the management. Usually the eldest brother would act as the manager in the business. This 'loaned land' might be a good way to encourage children to be involved in business and to generate money from idle land. However, this strategy has also created conflict among the siblings, particularly after the death of their father as the landowner. The conflict and argument often focused on who should inherit the business because it would not only be divided among the siblings but also among the children of the siblings. Carsten (1997: 100–101) has documented the conflict and disputes among siblings during the process of inheritance in Langkawi.

The development of tourism and new business opportunities has added to the tension and conflict in the division of land in Langkawi. The process of land acquisition might be the reason for a group of local entrepreneurs to abandon their dream to establish their businesses when they had to move to another area. However, those who are already involved in businesses and have opportunities to improve their businesses

might have to face another problem, that is, the division of such businesses. Such divisions could be a future threat to the development of local Malay business in Langkawi.

Under the LADA Act (1/1/1990), LADA would put all the land acquired from local people into its own land inventory, which will be used for future development. Project tenders would usually be granted to big companies so that these companies could develop certain areas of land in Langkawi. Since 1987, more than 32,000 hectares of land have been acquired from local people by the local authority for development purposes. Between 1990 and 1992, LADA paid more than RM100 in compensation for land acquisition (Idris 1996: 124). In this case, compulsory acquisition of land is therefore a powerful tool to retrieve land for development purposes. Development seems to be a convenient way to acquire private property by offering the property owner compensation of the fair market value (Idris 1996: 122). The practices instituted by this new Act witnessed gradual changes in land ownership in Langkawi. This legislation is a reminder to local people that local government has a right to acquire any land that has an economic potential for development.

The implementation of this Act and also the high demand for land has changed the way local people perceive land. Local people began to see the importance of land as an inheritance asset and realised that they should keep their land so that it could be bequeathed to their children and grandchildren. They started to make serious efforts in the legal division of property or the transfer of land titles. However, when the local government decided to stop applications for new land titles, many villagers were left without any legal right to their land. Therefore, when the local government began implementing the Land Acquisition Law to acquire land for development, these people were particularly vulnerable.

According to the Land Law, anyone on Reserved Land who has no land title or holds only a TOL licence may receive a certain amount of compensation for being removed from that land but may not be given other land in replacement. This means that villagers have to buy a new piece of land in order to build a new house. Problems arose when the financial compensation was not enough for them to buy land, let alone build a house or buy a house in a residential area.

Various problems have emerged in the local community due to the several shortcomings of this new legislation. One of its main shortcomings is the lack of definite timings to call for an inquiry after the Gazette Notification of Acquisition has been published (Yoke San 1975: 37). There is also no specified time for giving the compensation, and no specified time limit for the actual payment to be made. Yoke San argues that there is no easy means of negotiating a value of the property acquired. In many cases, the formula to value the land acquired was by taking the lowest price per square foot and applying in all round. This system has created dissatisfaction among those involved in land acquisition because the value of their land would determine the amount of compensation that they were entitled to receive. Those with only grass on their land might not object too strongly but those whose lands have a high potential for development have objected vigorously to such low awards. The problem became more complex when they could only challenge the local authorities' decision by making an appeal in the High Court. This brought difficulties to local villagers because court processes would usually involve costs, time and delay before the hearing. For villagers, this process was a frightening experience especially if they were not familiar with court proceedings. The shortcomings of this land acquisition Act have become the basis of conflict between local people and the local authorities. The impact of land acquisition was tremendous when large numbers of islanders were on TOL land or were still in the process of applying for land titles. The acquisition of land by the local authority in a

village called Kg Damai illustrates the implementation of this law and the effects of the displacement of people.

Land Acquisition: Local Narratives

Kg Damai is located at the heart of one of the main tourist attractions on Langkawi. Its beautiful beaches, which are considered to be among the most scenic areas on the island, and its location, which is far from the town centre, have attracted many tourists to the village. When I first visited the village in 1992, there were several residential houses and at least fourteen holiday chalets managed by the local villagers along the beach, a few of them owned by outsiders. The conflict over land acquisition was particularly intense because it affected the future of these fourteen chalets and the villagers who had been managing them for nearly ten years. When I returned to the village five years later for my fieldwork, all the residential houses and holiday chalets had been demolished four months earlier. The only things left which reminded me of the village were several notice boards bearing the chalets' names, still standing near the roadside. Today, all that the tourists see is a big notice board saying 'Public Beach', which has been erected by the roadside.

The story of land acquisition in Kg Damai began in the early 1992 when Minah, a local villager, in her mid sixties received two 'visitors', asking her permission to measure (*sukat tanah*) her land. Minah was among the first settlers in Kg Damai. She had moved from a nearby village in 1960 to work on her land in Kg Damai after marrying her eighth husband. At that time, she told me, the area was still forest and a boat was the only means of transport to reach the village. However, the beautiful scenery of the beach area had attracted several foreign tourists to come to the village. A few of the tourists then decided to stay there and Minah used to receive several of them as her

foster daughters (*anak angkat*). She told me proudly that she had a *mat saleh* tourist (foreign tourist) as her foster daughter for four years who had spent the whole time painting. Even though neither speaks the other's language, the interest shown by the *mat saleh* tourist in local activities had formed a close bond between them. The arrival of tourists in the village had encouraged several local people to build small rooms beside their houses to accommodate them. Gradually, those small rooms were extended into chalets. Minah told me that she was often asked by these new local chalet managers to help them by making pillowcases for their chalets. Several years later, the number of chalets run by the villagers had gradually increased and by early 1992, there were about 12 of them. The business seemed to be going smoothly until early 1992 when the two 'visitors' came to Minah's house to take measurements of her land without informing her of their actual purpose. Minah, who had no idea who these men were (they were actually from the local Land Office), thought that her husband (who was away at that time) had intended to mortgage the land. So, she just let the men measure her land.

However, their actual motive was revealed when one day all the villagers were invited to a meeting in the village hall. It was also attended by the District Officer and several other officers from the Land Office. At the meeting, as Minah recalled, they were told that the local government was interested in taking their land for a "development project" (*projek pembangunan*) and that they would be given compensation in return. The villagers, particularly the chalet managers, were astonished that they were not given any alternative at all; in fact the officers insisted that the land would be taken despite objections from local people. As one of the officers commented, "We shall take it if you give it up (without any objection) and we shall still take it if you don't give it up" (*nak bagi ambil, tak bagi pun ambil*). At first, most of the villagers

refused to give up their land, but they became divided when some of them were excited about receiving hundreds of thousands of ringgits as compensation, a sum that they had never dreamt of having in their entire lives. However, the chalet managers and a few other local villagers strongly rejected the government's decision.

To make things worse, the villagers became even more furious when they were offered a lower compensation rate. They discovered that their land had been sold to a third party for twice the original price. One local man told me that LADA would pay RM15 for every square foot of village land but would sell it to a third party for RM30 per square foot. On Langkawi, land value differs according to area. For example, the value for residential land in the town is between RM 270,00 and RM 480,000 per hectare (RM27 per square foot), whereas coastal land is worth around RM160, 000 per hectare (16 per square foot).¹⁶ However, these are not fixed rates used by the local authority to estimate the compensation rate. I was told that various rates were offered to the villagers for their land: from RM 7 to RM12 per square foot. The residents of Kg Damai acknowledged that the land was still owned by the government for most of it was under TOL licence. Nevertheless, they wanted the local government to be more considerate (*timbang rasa*). Minah said:

We were the ones who were pioneers on the land more than 30 years ago. This is our home, the land where we brought up our family, earned a living, and it is for our next generation. By taking into account all of these factors, the government should give a reasonable rate of compensation if they still want to take the land.

A local middle-aged man, whose house and shop had also been destroyed, witnessed how the villagers' rights had been manipulated. This man, whom I shall call

¹⁶ These values were estimated by the Valuation Department in 1988 as reported in the Langkawi Structure Plan (5-7).

Muaz, was determined to help his neighbours. At that time nobody in the village knew who he really was, for he had migrated to the village eight years earlier from the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Muaz had spent more than half of his life in big cities, working as a professional lawyer and businessman. In 1966, he went to England to study law. After being called to the Bar, he returned to Malaysia to practise law. At that time he was already married to a girl from his hometown and had two children. After practising law for some years, he decided to change his career and go into business in early 1980. After almost eight years in business, he realised that his life was 'empty' and, as he told me, he wanted "to go away and find [myself] again."

It was at this point that he decided to move away from the "city life and his luxurious lifestyle" to Langkawi Island, which was not a 'strange' place to him because he used to go there for relaxation and fishing trips. When he arrived on Langkawi in 1988, he did not know where to go but ended up squatting (*menumpang*) with one of the local villagers in Kg Damai. He decided to keep his real identity from the neighbours, for he wanted to become just an ordinary villager. Local people did not know of his purpose in coming to the village and thought that he was just a migrant (*pendatang*). At first, it was very difficult for him to become a villager (*orang kampung*) for he had to change his way of thinking and to learn how the villagers thought. Three years after migrating to Langkawi, he married a local woman who was a widow with one daughter. Her father had a small shop in the village, which she was helping him to manage. After the marriage, Muaz used his money (from his own savings) to improve the condition of the shop, after which the business became a success. When he arrived in the village, he did not hear any rumours about land acquisition. It was only in early 1990 that he heard that the local government wanted to acquire land in the neighbouring village, Kg Air. He told me that despite the fact that many of the villagers were dissatisfied with the government's decision, everybody seemed to keep their resentment to themselves. At

one stage he wanted to get involved but was simply ignored by the villagers for he was still considered an 'outsider' and was told that he "did not know a thing about this". Five months after the land acquisition in Kg Air, the local government announced that the land in his village was to be *warta kerajaan* (government's property) – the first stage in the acquisition of land. At this point, he realised that the rights of the villagers should be protected. Explaining to them about land law would be an important weapon to protect their rights. Firstly, he had to inform them of his skill to acquire authority. Gradually, the villagers realised his skill and started seeking advice from him. He then began discreetly helping them by drafting letters and giving advice on their rights to the land, and also support and encouragement.

It was through Lela, a young woman who lived in the same village as Muaz, that I became interested in finding out about Muaz. One day, I was interviewing Lela's father when she came with her husband and son to see her parents for the usual visit. When she heard that I was interested in studying the impact of tourism on Langkawi, she suggested that I should meet and interview this particular man in her village because, Lela insisted, he was such a good talker (*pandai cakap*). She did not actually tell me who he really was but kept on saying that many of the villagers came to his house almost every night to 'talk' or just to ask for his help for "he was a very clever (*pandai*) man." At this point I had no idea who he was and how important his role was in this issue of land acquisition. One day, after an arrangement made by Lela, I went to his house. He had just moved into the village of Kg Anggerik, five months after the demolition in Kg Damai. I brought my foster mother along as I was still in the process of establishing my rapport in the village. Including her in the meeting turned out to be a very wise decision for I was very uncomfortable during the first few minutes interviewing Muaz. As I had expected, he was rather suspicious.

His house was a small semi-permanent building (wood and cement), whose front veranda contained several chairs, being a place for entertaining visitors and holding discussions with the villagers. The veranda was separated from the adjoining room by a big door, a type normally used for shops, often left wide open for most of the day. It was also used as a sign for visitors that he was at home. The adjoining room was more like an office. There was a big table in one corner with numerous files and newspaper cuttings on it. A telephone and a fairly old typewriter were on the other small table. I was in fact quite surprised to see that the bookshelves were full of academic books, whose subjects ranged from law to '*Emotional Intelligence*' by Alvin Toffler. At this point, I realised that the person I was going to meet was not an ordinary man. When I arrived at his house, his wife greeted us with a friendly smile and told us that her husband had just woken up, though it was already 1.00 p.m. She told me that her husband went to bed at 6.00 a.m.: "That's what he normally does...talking to people until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and reading until 5.00 a.m."

A few minutes later, a middle-aged man wearing traditional Malay dress (*baju melayu cekak musang*) and sarong came into the room and took his seat behind his office table. I introduced myself and told him in general about my purpose in meeting him. He was a very articulate person, soft-spoken, very careful in choosing his words. At first he was a little suspicious and started to interrogate me. At this point I knew that honesty about my research would be the best way to allay his suspicions. So I described the reason for my being in the village, my research topic and the university where I was studying. I introduced my foster mother and then found out that they were actually distant cousins (*sepupu jauh*). However, that did not seem to allay his suspicions for he asked me who had recommended me to see him.

Having a vast knowledge of law, Muaz saw that the Land Acquisition Act had to some extent being exploited by the government to acquire the land. Muaz then became my good informant and was unofficially 'elected' by the villagers to represent them to the government. His knowledge of law and his charisma gained him respect not only from local people but also from the authorities. It was an open secret to the local authorities that the villagers were seeking help from him. He told me that he was helping from behind the scenes but that the villagers should be aware of their rights, have confidence, and defend their rights themselves. In the case of Kg Damai, Muaz argued that the law was amended only several months before the land acquisition to state that any land could be taken by the government for the purpose of 'development' projects. Prior to Demolition Day, several notices were given to the villagers, instructing them to relocate their business premises and houses elsewhere.

However, the authorities claimed that the notices were simply ignored by the villagers. I was told instead that several memoranda were sent to the Kedah Chief Minister to express local disagreement with the government's decision in taking their land. However, the government's determination to take the land was manifested when all the premises were demolished, owing to the villagers' reluctance to remove their business premises to other areas. So, one day in mid 1997, several government officers, together with local people from neighbouring villages, were in Kg Damai to witness the demolition. A group of police officers were also there to observe the process and to control any resistance from the local people. The majority of the chalet managers still refused to co-operate, so that they did not even remove their belongings, which were destroyed along with the chalets.

After Demolition Day

After Demolition Day, all the resident of Kg Indah had to find somewhere else to live. However, negotiations between the residents and the local authority through Muaz as mediator produced some success for the now homeless villagers. In 1995, LADA, on behalf of the state government, agreed to pay compensation (half of the market price) to local people who resided on request land or TOL land which was to be taken by the government. The state government also agreed to provide a new area, 4,000 square feet of land, for a new settlement for the resident affected, although they still had to pay for the land by instalments. However, at the time, the villagers were still not satisfied with the financial compensation and the loss of their sources of income. As part of their strategy in rejecting the rate of compensation, none of the chalet managers accepted the money offered to them, particularly the local chalet managers, for they argued that they were also entitled to compensation for losing their business income. It was Muaz's efforts as mediator that enabled the former chalet managers to acquire an area provided by the local government to set up their own businesses. Finally, the government gave approval for 25.5 acres of land, near to two other hotels, to be given to the former chalet managers and suggested that they build a 3-star hotel. In order to build this hotel, the former chalet managers have formed a company.

The Effects of Land Acquisition by the Local Government

The acquisition of land by the local government in Kg Air and Kg Indah had a profound effect on the Langkawi islanders in that their perception of land was changed. They began to realise that the government's action was a new threat to their rights as *orang kampung* (village people) and therefore having land or retaining land became very important to them. This awareness emerged when the local villagers felt cheated after

their land, which had been sold to LADA, was then sold to a third party, project developers, for more than twice the original price. LADA, which was acting as the intermediary, or as the villagers called it, 'landbroker' (*broker tanah*), was accused of making more profit than that which the villagers had received from the land sale. The villagers told me that it was unfair because "they [the LADA] made a profit without any cost to them (*dapat duit atas angin*). If they really want to help local villagers they should offer us higher prices." As a result, local people began to realise that they should retain their land rather than selling it to LADA. There were several cases of villagers who had sold their land because of the temptation of 'instant money.' However, they were now landless and penniless for they had spent their money on an extravagant lifestyle. Such an outcome increased local people's awareness of the importance of having land as an asset. Prior to the development of tourism, there was very little outside interest in the land and land was of little value (*tak ada nilai*) in monetary terms. However, local people began to sell their land when its price soared beyond belief, particularly beach land, which was sold by the square foot. However, they then realised that "land can be kept but not money" (*duit boleh habis tapi tanah boleh simpan*). One local man told me, "I don't want to sell my land...in fact, someone offered me RM20,000 for the land but I love (*sayang*) my land." The shift from a "desire to sell" their land to "not to sell" their land was based on their realisation that it had become a valuable financial asset. Land was regarded as a 'bank' because they knew that its value would increase. Therefore, instead of selling their land for cash, they decided to retain it.

Land acquisition in Kg Damai by the government illustrates why landownership became so important to the Langkawi people. The realisation that land was a very useful source of income, particularly for the local tourist industry, gave a greater impetus to local people to conserve it. Without land, it would be difficult to earn a living. In Kg Damai, it was the land that provided the villagers with an income. The fourteen local

chalet managers earned their living from the chalets that had been built on their land. Once the government had taken their land, their source of income was destroyed. Without land, it was very difficult for the former chalet managers to establish another business. They argued that it was not only that they did not have enough capital but also that there was no longer a suitable area available. One of the former chalet managers told me, "To set up another chalet business would be impossible. Either most of the coastal land has been taken by the government for development projects or they simply don't give us new coastal land because any further development on coastal land has been prohibited."¹⁷ After their business was destroyed, several of the former chalet managers tried to find alternative employment. One of them who was in his mid twenties, found a job in a construction sub-project in the village, while some of them, I was told, were going back to fishing. Another, Pak Din, considered himself lucky when he managed to establish a car wash service near the town; a year after his chalet had been demolished.

The land acquisition and the displacement of the villagers of Kg Damai have increased the anxiety of the people in Langkawi over the challenge to their rights as village people. The fear of losing land has provoked a serious debate on the link between land and their identity as Langkawi people. It was revealed that the determining factor, repeatedly stated, for retaining land was for the sake of my children and grandchildren (*untuk anak cucu kita*). Previously, long residence in a particular area could be an important determinant of their right to the land. However, the demands of tourism and the implementation of the Land Acquisition Act meant that the government at any time could take their land away. As one of the villagers said, "If they say that it [the land] is for 'development', we can't argue much" (*kalau dah depa kata untuk pembangunan, kita tak boleh kata apalah*). The villagers viewed land as an asset for inheritance and a

¹⁷ According to the Langkawi Structure Plan, the beach area will be preserved in its natural state or will be developed only for public purposes (1992: 5-16).

means of giving them a local identity. If they were landless, they could simply be marginalized or even expelled from Langkawi. Therefore, if there were no land for their children to inherit, then their children's future in the local territory would be uncertain. Land had become a symbol of security for the future generations (see Clark 1966). On Langkawi, by retaining their land and passing it on to their children, they might secure a place for their children to remain on Langkawi. One villager summed up this fear when he said, "We don't want to be squatters on the land that was ours" (*menumpang di tanah sendiri*).

Weiner's analysis of inalienable wealth in the Trobriands argues:

Keeping those things instead of giving them away is essential to retaining one's social identity [and that] the primary value of inalienably, however, is expressed through the power these things have to define and locate who one is in the historical sense. The objects act as a vehicle for ringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles or mythological events become an intimate part of a person's present identity. To lose this claim to the past is to lose part of who one is in the present.

(Weiner 1985: 210-1)

However, I observed that land was not so much a symbol of legacy or an ancestral reminder to one's descendants (cf. McKay 1987), for Langkawi people are more concerned with the future generations (see Carsten 1990, 1995). It can also be argued that land, particularly ancestral land (*tanah pesaka*), is viewed by local people as an insurance policy for the future generations. In many cases, if people on Langkawi were interested in selling their land (if they had several acres), they preferred to sell *tanah sendiri* (one's own land) rather than their *tanah pesaka*.¹⁸ This preference can be linked

¹⁸ *Tanah sendiri* (one's own land) refers to bought land (*tanah beli*). Its status would be changed to inheritance land (*tanah pesaka*) after the death of the owner.

interested in selling their land (if they had several acres), they preferred to sell *tanah sendiri* (one's own land) rather than their *tanah pesaka*.¹⁸ This preference can be linked to their view that *tanah pesaka* is the land for their children and grandchildren. As one of the villagers told me, "I keep my *tanah pesaka* because that's 'my parents' land' ...my parents gave it to me and it's for my children." There is a strong attachment to *tanah pesaka*, and its sale, particularly for profit, would create a sense of guilt. Nevertheless, there were several instances of *tanah pesaka* being sold. It was observed that those who sold *tanah pesaka* purely for profit would be seen as too greedy (*tamak sangat*). Hence, those who wanted to sell their land would normally sell their *tanah sendiri* and retain their *tanah pesaka*. In fact, many of the chalets run by local villagers were built on *tanah pesaka*. The development of tourism made the Langkawi islanders aware that they could use their land as a means of participating in this industry.

This significant association between land and identity in Langkawi can be illustrated by the long struggle of Mat Saman, who decided to challenge in court the local government's decision to take his land. The interesting aspect of his struggle was that, unlike other villagers, he had a legal right to his land (a land title). However, the government wanted it to build a golf course. Since he refused to give up his land and accept compensation, he had to bring his case to court in order to challenge the government's decision. His long ordeal began in early 1990 when a big project, an 18-hole golf course, as I was told, was planned in the area that included Mat Saman's village, Kg Air. He was determined not to sell his land for he had cultivated it for more than twenty years. He said that he was the one who had to deal with all kinds of wild animals while clearing it and he was the one who cultivated various kinds of fruit and vegetables, which he then sold at the local market. It was on this land that he planted

¹⁸ *Tanah sendiri* (one's own land) refers to bought land (*tanah beli*). Its status would be changed to inheritance land (*tanah pesaka*) after the death of the owner.

nearly 110 mango trees, which proved to be a good source of income. He told me that he would receive nearly RM250 per tree if he were to sell it. He argued that if the government was to take his land, it would take not only his source of income but also deny all his efforts (*penat lelah*) in working (*mengusahakan*) the land. Instead of identifying, with his land as his birthplace, he identified with it as his workplace, where he had put all his *penat lelah* in working the land (cf. McKay 1987). Long residence on the land and his efforts in cultivating it had created a sentimental attachment to it. The villagers argued that working the land “with one own’s sweat” (*titik peluh sendiri*) for a long time should become a symbol of their rights to it for they considered the land to be theirs. Basing their case on these factors, the villagers expected some kind of consideration from local authorities. As they said, “It [the local authority] should have more sympathy (*belas kasihan*), especially for village people (*orang kampung*) like us. I was the one who cleared the land and worked it for so long. They should be more considerate.”

Mat Saman, who has seven children, expressed his fear, “We don’t know what our children’s future will look like. At least by having this land, their future is fairly guaranteed (*terjamin sikit*) though not fully guaranteed. I don’t want my children to become strangers on their own land.” Initially, several of his co-villagers accused him of being stubborn and stupid when he refused to sell his land and had to undergo a long ordeal to retain it. His court case put him in a depression for nearly eight years. At the end of my fieldwork, his case was not yet settled. The first time that I met Mat Saman, he was quite reluctant to tell his story for he thought that I was one of the ‘government people.’ However, when he found out that I knew about Muaz, who had taught him land law for six months and become his adviser throughout his eight-year struggle, and also that one of his lawyers was my former lecturer, he opened up to me. In fact, he asked me to help him to fulfil his last chance in fighting for his land. One day, he told me that the

only way to “play a game with these politicians (the government) was to play a bit of politics (*main politik*).” He knew that his court case would take a few years to settle. So, when he heard that the Chief Minister was planning to come to the village for a political campaign, he offered himself to the local UMNO representative to be the host for the *Perhimpunan Bersama Rakyat* (Meeting with People) ceremony, which was to be held at his house. By offering his house, which had been built on the disputed land, as the venue of the ceremony, Mat Saman could show the Chief Minister (who was also responsible for implementing Land Acquisition Act) his efforts in utilising his land and also invite him to view his new chalet. He knew that the Chief Minister, who was newly appointed by the Prime Minister, did not receive strong support from the villagers.

In fact, his appointment provoked objections from his own party members, particularly from the local branches.¹⁹ Despite that, he was still appointed by the prime minister. Mat Saman told me that since the Chief Minister wanted to use the ceremony to attract local voters, he could use it to fulfil his mission. He told me, “I want him to step on this land, the land that he [the government] wants to take.”

For Mat Saman, the Chief Minister’s presence on his land symbolised the government’s acknowledgement of his long struggle and also a symbolic gesture of his victory in retaining his land even though his court case was not yet settled. Since that ceremony would be a “historical” event for him and his grandchildren, he wanted me to record it with my video camera. During the ceremony, a local man in his forties came up to me and expressed his admiration for Mat Saman’s struggle. He then told me that his land adjoined that of Mat Saman but had been sold to LADA - a decision he was later to

¹⁹ The election of the new Chief Minister of Kedah State provoked objections from 22 local UMNO branches in Kedah State. Earlier he was competing as MP Kuah town in 1995 and became the local representatives (*wakil rakyat*) of Kuah area. However, he lost his position as Kuah UMNO Chief to his deputy who became the Member of Parliament for Langkawi (MASSA, May 1997, p. 27).

regret – and he admitted to me how stupid he had been to give up the land. He said, “If I was not so stupid at that time, I would’ve kept the land for me to have and for my children. I was scared. The government asked for my land...what could I do...so I just gave in.” He then told me how brave Mat Saman was: “He [mat Saman] has been very brave and stubborn. He did it not because he wanted to challenge the government or because he was anti-development but to defend his land for his children and his grandchildren.”

Mat Saman summed up his struggle to retain his land when he said, “If we have no land, then we’re not Langkawi people anymore” (*kalau dah tak ada tanah, bukan orang Langkawi lagilah*). For him, being Langkawi people meant “to stay in Langkawi and live here”. “If we don’t have land, then we’re just squatting (*menumpang*) on our land and without land we can easily be kicked-out (*tendang*) from this place.” This statement was based on the fear that they might one day have to leave Langkawi because the land would be too expensive to buy. This has led to the debate on the link between land and identity as Langkawi people. This threat of being forced to leave, as Caplan says, “provides the edge to the struggle for land” (1970: 7).

The problem of land acquisition from local villagers for tourist development and the dilemma faced by the landowners has also been revealed on Pangkor Island,²⁰ Malaysia (see MASSA 1997). On Pangkor Island, the islanders, who were mostly fishermen, feared for their future because many of them still did not have land of their own.²¹ Their concern was increased after their applications to acquire land through the local Land Office were turned down because outsiders owned much of the land.²² The Pangkor islanders faced a threat similar to that faced by the Langkawi people for they

²¹ “Rintihan Nelayan Pulau Pangkor”, MASSA, 7 July 1997.

²² MASSA 7, July 1997 p. 26.

pointed out that they would eventually be marginalized if their *hak asasi* (basic rights) as local people were not protected by the state government. An article in a local magazine discussed the effects of land acquisition by the local government and how the islanders associated the land with their identity as the villagers. Their argument was as follows:

The land question is very closely related to *maruah bangsa* (state sovereignty) *harga diri* (dignity). If a *bangsa* (nation) does not have land in its own state, it is like losing one's *hak warisan* (inheritance rights) or losing state sovereignty.

(MASSA 1997)

Since the government for tourist development had taken most of the land, the islanders were advised instead to “change their lifestyle and one way of accepting changes is by staying in low-cost houses (*rumah flat*).”²³

In the case of Langkawi, the association of land and identity as Langkawi people is also interrelated to Malay identity. This identity is based on the perceived contrast between the Malay villagers of the island and the Chinese traders and Indians on the rubber estates. One of the former chalet managers argued, “The government should help us and not destroy our Malay business. They should protect the Malays (*bela nasib melayu*).” Many scholars have focused on the interpretative relationship between stories, land and identity.²⁴ Forbes (1999) argues that the struggles over land rights are struggles over the relationship between identity and the land. He argues that an analysis should also take into account factors such as who own the land to which identities have become attached, how claims to land are being contested and how these systems of tenure are being transformed. On Langkawi, it was revealed that the association between

²³ *ibid.* p. 27. The minimum rate for low-cost housing is RM 25,000 per unit. The majority of local people could not afford to buy a house in a residential area, costing between RM 180,000 and RM300,000.

²⁴ (See also De Carteau 1984).

land and identity emerged during the struggles to retain the land. In the next section I shall discuss the conflict that arose between the Langkawi islanders and the local authorities.

Durian and Cucumber: LADA and Local Villagers

Land titles and the new land law caused conflict between the local authorities and the islanders. Since the local people were not fully aware of their legal rights, the gap between what was claimed orally and what was documented legally became the primary cause of conflict. Both parties emphatically stated their claims to the land - but from different perspectives. The local authorities claimed that the government did not “take the local villagers’ land but the government land.” The local officer who was directly responsible for the demolition in Kg Damai explained to me that the local villagers had no legal right to the land for most of that area was still owned by the state government. He argued: “The government has no intention of ‘killing’ local Malay business; we are just taking back the government’s property.” In fact, he insisted, “They [the local business operators] have been making a huge profit for nearly ten years on the government’s land but the government has not taken even single cent from them.” As if demanding some kind of justification from me, he then said, “Don’t you think that is *haram* (unlawful)?” He in fact had asked the local imam (prayer leader) about the matter.

The officer also argued that the unplanned development in that area, where most of the chalets were not well situated and had a poor sewerage system, was giving a bad image to tourists. It was also claimed that the location of several chalets had exceeded the limit of the reserved beach so much that the chalet managers had created a private beach. According to the Langkawi Structural Plan (LSP), any existing development

along the beach should be 50 metres from the high tide level and 80 metres for any future development on coastal land (1992: 5-17). The local authority officer argued that, according to the law, the government had a right to take the land without compensation. He then maintained, "We didn't do anything wrong; we just took back what was owned by the government." Instead of looking at the question from the legal perspective, Langkawi islanders argued that they deserved a certain amount of compensation because they had been cultivating the land for generations. They argued that rather than following 'rules by the book,' the government should show mercy (*belas ihsan*) towards the local villagers.

The fact that all development projects for Langkawi Island have to be first submitted to and approved by the Board of Directors of LADA manifests LADA's highest authority in determining the type of development in the area. The significant role of LADA in developing the land made local people think that it was fully responsible for land acquisition, whereas it was actually under the authority of the local Land Office on behalf of the state government. The Langkawi islanders often said: "LADA *ambil*" (LADA took the land), rather than referring to the local Land Office. The resentment towards LADA may be attributed to its role, which was that of a middleman (*orang tengah*) or land broker when making a higher profit from the sale of land on Langkawi. One local man argued that though LADA was not responsible for taking the land, it was responsible for its development and for deciding which developer should be granted permission for tourism development. The high prices that the LADA received from these transactions - sometimes double the prices paid to landowners - produced a strong resentment of the agency.²⁵

²⁵ For example, LADA has subsidiary companies operating ferry services, it holds 30 per cent equity in Rebak Marina Sdn. Bhd which is developing a marina-cum-yacht club on Rebak Island, and 30 per cent equity in Permai Sekutu (M) Sdn. Bhd which manages the Air Hangat Cultural Village (*North Review* 1995: 46).

Since then, the word *pengambilan tanah* (land acquisition) and LADA became synonymous and hostility grew between LADA and the Langkawi people. Local people viewed themselves as 'powerless' and thought that it would be impossible to challenge LADA particularly on the question of land. One local man in his sixties told me,

Who are we compared with them? They are so strong, we are weak. We don't know about law, we are *bodoh*,²⁶ we don't go to school (*tak sekolah*). So how are we going to fight back if we do not have knowledge. So, whatever they say, we follow. They ask us to sell, we sell. If we do not sell, then they will threaten us.

One villager, who seemed to be very vocal about LADA, compared the relationship between LADA and local people to that between cucumber and *durian*²⁷ (*timun* and *durian*). He explained, "Being a *timun*, you will always be the one who is hurt: either you are rolling on the *durian* or being rolled on by it. Either way, we as *timun* are always on the 'powerless' side, whereas LADA as the *durian* has the authority and uses the power to threaten us." The resentment towards the local authority, particularly LADA, was so obvious that it often created tension in public. One day I was at Pak Din's car wash service, waiting for my foster brother's car to be washed. While washing a Mercedes Benz, Pak Din was telling me about how his chalet had been demolished by the local authority. The owner of the car, a man in his forties wearing a nice suit, shiny shoes, expensive watch and a big ring on his fingers, came towards us. He was standing next to us, trying to listen to our conversation. I knew that the man was a VIP who had just arrived from Kuala Lumpur to attend a local function and I was quite worried when Pak Din seemed to ignore his presence. At one point, the man interrupted

²⁶ *bodoh* literally means stupid. However Langkawi people often use this term to mean not having much ilmu (education) so that they can be easily manipulated by other people for their own benefit. *Tak sekolah* (not going to school) also led to not having ilmu.

²⁷ *Durian* is a local fruit, which has a spiky skin and is known as the king of Malaysian fruit.

us and asked Pak Din, "Don't you think that you need to know a politician to help your business?" That question indeed annoyed Pak Din and in a heightened tone he snapped back, "I don't need to know an politician (*orang politik*)!" I whispered to Pak Din to be careful because the man might be a politician. Instead of softening his tone, he said, "I don't care and I'm not scared whether he is politician or one of the LADA people" (*peduli apa saya, dia orang politik ke, orang LADA ke, saya tak takut*). I was quite surprised when the man said nothing in reply and just walked away.

The strong resentment towards LADA is manifested by the way the acronym LADA has been reinterpreted as *Lagi Ada Depa Ambik*, a derogatory term which literally means "whatever is there, they [LADA] take it." In Malay, *lada* also means chillies, which taste 'hot' (*pedas*). This hot sensation reflects the relationship between LADA and Langkawi people. Ironically, once upon a time *lada hitam* (black pepper) was Langkawi's main export.²⁸ Today it was LADA that made Langkawi famous not only for its development of the island but also for its relationship with the local people. The islanders did acknowledge LADA's role in making a huge improvement in the local infrastructure but at the same time its role as land broker was claimed to be oppressive (*menekan*).

Conclusion

The development of Langkawi Island by the implementation of the five-year Langkawi Structural Plan indeed caused the reorganization of the local public administration system. However, the new regulations and the complexities of acquiring a land title, in which the islanders are not well versed, has become the cause for conflict between the local people and the local authorities. Owing to their lack of knowledge, people in

²⁸ See Gullick 1987.

Langkawi did not know their rights regarding their own land, which put them in a defenceless position. The above discussion has focused on how government land ('request' and TOL) was taken from the islanders. However, the acquisition of land on Langkawi by the state government for the purpose of tourism development was not in fact restricted to government land but also affected private landownership. The high demand for tourism facilities such as golf courses requires a huge area of land, which has resulted in the forced resettlement of villagers who have occupied the land for generations.

During the land acquisition, the Langkawi islanders expressed deep attachment to their land. The importance of land ownership symbolised their identity as Langkawi people. This identity is emphasised by the inheritance of land by their children and grandchildren. Land also symbolises their geographical identity as Langkawi people. Their fear of being marginalized and then gradually forced to leave Langkawi underlines their efforts to maintain their identity. Saman's tale of a continuing struggle over his land serves as an example to highlight the complex relationship between the economic survival and identity of the local people.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the resentment towards the government, particularly the local authorities, was due to the way in which the authorities handled land matters and the welfare of people in Langkawi who were affected by the land acquisition. The systematic development of Langkawi according to the Langkawi Structural Plan witnessed the forced resettlement of a group of local people and many others who had to find somewhere else to live. It is argued here that the strong resentment of local people was not so much directed at tourism development as a whole or the arrival of tourists on the island. In fact, local people acknowledged the role of the government and LADA in bringing development to Langkawi Island, which

to a large extent has changed the basic lifestyle of its people. They seemed willing to make the sacrifice of moving elsewhere to make way for the government's projects as long as the government was sensitive, when assessing compensation, to their arduous efforts in cultivating the land. However, local people were often put in a dilemma between the need for development and the protection of their basic needs that is, land. Rather than being seen as protecting their rights, the islanders' refusal to give up their land was often perceived as an obstruction to development or was called anti-development. This perception forced them to relinquish possession of their land to the authority though it meant that they had to start a new life elsewhere. On the one hand the islanders were blamed for not taking the opportunities offered by tourism development on Langkawi, but on the other hand, a group of local entrepreneurs who played an active part already in the local tourist industry, which I discuss in detail in chapter 7, were denied their right to continue in the same way.

The acquisition of land and the displacement of many local villagers have left people in Langkawi confused about the meaning of 'development' for them. The continual rhetorical use of 'development' (*pembangunan*) by the local authorities to justify their taking the villagers' land has put the islanders in a dilemma: whether to give up their land or to retain it and be labelled 'anti-development'. The government's persistence in integrating Langkawi in a global market tourist industry within a short time has indeed drastically transformed the island. It is argued that the apparent intervention by the federal government and its focused attention on Langkawi has accelerated the rate of development. This drastic change has to some extent created conflict between local people and the local authorities.

However, this is not to suggest that the conflict on Langkawi has turned violent. The islanders insist that they are not 'anti-development' but that any development

should give prosperity to local people and not jeopardise their income sources. The result is that the islanders' view of land has changed. Previously, land was an important asset for agriculture and inheritance. Today it is perceived as a commodity that can be transacted in the market to generate cash. It can be said that one's wealth is partly measured by the number of acres of land one possesses. Considering the land prices, which keep increasing, the more acres of land one has, the richer one is. Land means 'money' and it is land, which has produced millionaires. It was reported that several Langkawi people had become *jutawan* (millionaires) by selling land.²⁹ It has been argued that land is not simply a commodity but a symbol of the Langkawi people's continued existence on Langkawi. As Wilson pointed out in his study of Providencia, the "knowledge that he owns a piece of land on Providencia is perhaps the single most important factor in the preservation of a man's identity" (Wilson 1973: 46). However, Langkawi people saw the trend in land acquisition on Langkawi, enforced by the state authority for the sake of tourism development, as a threat to future generations.

²⁹ "8 People Become Millionaires" (*Utusan Malaysia*, 25 January 1991).

Chapter 3

Tourist Images: The Reproduction of Local Myths

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which the local tourist authorities, with strong support from the federal government, have responded to the demand for new objects suitable for a 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990). Tourism requires the construction of new objects, not only to create new desires and fantasies, but also to be consumed: gazed at, purchased, photographed, narrated and understood (see Selwyn 1996). Many different ways have been used by not only the local authorities and tourist agencies but also by local people to reproduce what Volkman refers to as the 'objectification of culture' for tourists (Volkman 1990; Erb 1997; Yamashita 1997; Ofra 2000). The 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983) and culture have been seen as part of a larger social phenomenon. The vast literature on this theme mainly covers questions of invention related to nationalism (Handler 1988; Hanson 1989) and the construction of the modern nation state (Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983).

On Langkawi, I argue that the new tourist objects were the result of the reproduction of local myths that underwent selection, manipulation and packaging: in other words, they were manufactured, reinterpreted and transformed from only narrative and imagination into visual objects. This reproduction was partly a response to a demand to diversify the tourist gaze and partly a means to economic gain. I argue here that this reproduction of the 'past' should be seen as an attempt by the local authorities not only to re-emphasise the image of Langkawi as the Land of Legends, a theme which has been echoed in the tourist brochures, but also to create a new image of the island by ascribing symbolic meanings to the new objects constructed.

The following is an account of tourism as a process, in which I show how a set of tourist objects has been reproduced. The new tourist attractions on Langkawi could be divided into two categories: modern and historical. The modern attractions included Underwater World, Crocodile Farm and Marine Park, while the historical attractions were tourist sites presenting local myths, such as the Mahsuri Mausoleum, the Hot Water Spring, the Black Sand Beach, and the Field of Burnt Rice. The latest additions to these historical sites were the Eagle Square and Legends on the Park. These historical attractions are the main topic of this chapter. A brief history sets the stage for the analysis of the use of local myths to reproduce these three new objects of 'tourist gaze': Mahsuri's portrait, Eagle Square and the Legends on the Park. The 'original' myths were selected and then new objects were reproduced by dislocation, replacement, reconstruction and interpretation. I also discuss how these new objects of 'tourist gaze' were reproduced on postcards, gradually replacing the old version of the tourist brochures. Lastly, I examine how tourists and local tourist authorities responded to this 'myth consumption.'

Local Myth and Legends: Discourse and Role

It is widely known that the local government, with strong support from the federal government, invested billions of ringgits in the island to provide essential infrastructure and to beautify its landscape. Owing to the demands of tourism, several new tourist attractions had been planned for construction. Previously, most of the tourist attractions had been constructed on the original sites where the myths occurred, and were scattered around the island. Tourists had to travel from one place to another to visit the sites. However, it was said that these sites did not provide enough tourist activities. The local tourist authorities realised that to develop local tourism, more tourist sites should be built not only to diversify the 'tourist gaze' but also to increase tourist expenditure. It

was argued that an increase in tourist sites would create more activities for tourists and therefore encourage them to lengthen their stay on the island. The longer tourists spent on the island, the more money would be contributed to the local economy. LADA, which was responsible for the development of tourism, began to plan new tourist sites. A new landmark, which would become a symbol of Langkawi, was planned, together with the construction of a new theme park. The importance of having a landmark that symbolised the 'identity' of Langkawi as a tourist destination had been articulated by the general manager of LADA:

People in Langkawi and tourists coming to the island do not have the added attractions to keep the fond memory alive of Langkawi except for the sun, sea, shore and shopping. If they visit some other major tourist destinations, there are attractions, which are synonymous with the destinations like the Opera House in Sydney and the Statue of Liberty in New York. So for Langkawi, we also want to create a similar kind of attraction which tourists will remember.

(North Review, 1995: 69)

For this construction, LADA emphasised that it was crucial that the new creation of tourist objects should be based on Langkawi's identity, such as the local myths and legends. Therefore, these were chosen and used to create a sense of distinctiveness and 'authenticity'. As the General Manager of LADA said:

We don't want to have identical attractions or products with other places...as far as Langkawi is concerned, visitors will get the best of pure relaxation and a real holiday where they can leisurely get to enjoy the sun, sea, sand, and the wide-variety of duty-free shopping and at the same time discover the rich culture and the interesting historical background of Langkawi. We have an identity of our own.

*(North Review 1995: 15)*¹

¹ North Review is a bi-monthly publication by the Kedah State Development Corporation.

For this landmark, the construction of a giant eagle, later called Eagle Square, was planned. I discuss later why the image of an eagle was chosen as the symbol of Langkawi. Since Langkawi was famous for local myths and legends, LADA was also planning to build a park that would become a centre for various collections of local myths or a 'package of myths.' Instead of being scattered around the island, the local myths were removed and reconstructed in one confined area. These new tourist objects were expected to attract tourists who were usually looking for something different. MacCannell (1976) argued that the modern tourist was an 'archetypical structuralist' who had the desire to recover those senses of wholeness and structure absent from everyday life. Following that, Dann (1996) also argued that tourists were mythmakers in the way in which they 'cognitively create and recreate structures which modernity is felt to have demolished' (1996: 2). This mythical structure was what was referred to as 'tourist myths.' Instead of looking at how tourists create 'myth', my discussion is concerned with how the local tourist authorities re-create and reconstruct 'tourist myths' to fulfil tourist desires in seeking these 'mythological structures'.

In Langkawi, the construction of the 'tourist myth' was based on the manipulation of a variety of local myths and legends that originated within the Island. Myth and legend² have become synonymous with Langkawi Island for they seem to have surrounded its development and become so intertwined with its history that it is very difficult to separate one from the other. Myth and tourism have been closely associated as represented in tourist brochures. The following are typical examples of

² In this discussion, the terms 'myth' and 'legend' are interchangeably.

Langkawi tourist brochures. One brochure published by the Malaysian Tourist Board described Langkawi as

The islands [which] are blessed with an intriguing heritage of fabulous myths and legends of ogres and gigantic birds, warriors and fairy princesses, battles and romance. As a natural paradise, the islands are perhaps unmatched anywhere else in Southeast Asia.³

An international hotel's brochure also emphasised the word 'legend' in its opening sentence:

Langkawi, the island of Legends, will enthrall you in its magical spell where the cool calm speaks an ancient language of peace and serenity with first class legend on a deluxe class beach.

Besides showing a picture of the hotel with its restaurant and recreational facilities, the brochure listed the five historical sites considered to be legendary, with a brief description of each site. It also showed five historical sites: the Isle of the Pregnant Lady, the Hot Springs, the Seven Wells, Mahsuri's tomb and the Field of Burnt Rice. The significance of this association is evident when most of the names of towns and the places are derived from certain incidents that happened in Langkawi in the past. For example, the Field of Burnt Rice (*Beras Terbakar*) was said to be the traces of burnt rice in a village that was burned down by the Siamese during their invasion of Langkawi in the mid-nineteenth century. It was asserted that the traces could still be seen after heavy rain. It was also alleged that the name of the Lake of the Pregnant Maiden (*Pulau Dayang Bunting*), the largest lake in Langkawi Island, was derived from the legend of a lovely fairy princess who married an earthly prince. Her first child died shortly after birth. She was so sad and depressed that she buried the child in the crystal clear waters

³ *North Review*: 'Langkawi Soars to Greater Heights', September/October 1995.

of the lake. It was told that before she returned to her fairy abode, she blessed the waters so that any childless maiden who bathed in the lake would conceive thereafter. It was said that the outline of the lake resembled the shape of a pregnant maiden lying on her back.

For the discussion in this chapter, I have selected two new tourist attractions on the island - the Legends on the Park and Eagle Square – and I shall describe how local myth was reproduced to create these sites. The reason for selecting these two historical sites was that both represented the same theme, for the Mahsuri legend was the strong element in the construction of both of them. The Mahsuri Mausoleum, a famous tourist site, represented the older version of a historical site, built long before Langkawi was declared a duty-free port, whereas both Eagle Square and the Legends on the Park represented the new historical site, which was only recently opened to the public. It is therefore necessary to discuss the Mahsuri legend, which became an important influence in the construction of new tourist objects.

From Myth to Art

Among all the local myths and legends that exist on Langkawi, the Mahsuri legend is the most famous and widely talked about. This is because it was often closely associated with the historical development of the island, as described in several books written after Mahsuri was executed (Ismail 1995). Most local people alleged that it was the curse of Mahsuri that hindered development on the island for several generations.

The Mahsuri legend tells how about two hundreds years ago a local couple gave birth to a baby girl, who was later named Mahsuri. Her renowned beauty soon came to the attention of the village headman. She was then married to the headman's younger

brother. The happy couple had to separate when her husband was sent to fight the Siamese. During his absence, Mahsuri befriended a poet who came from Sumatra. The headman's wife, who envied Mahsuri's fame and beauty, accused Mahsuri of committing adultery with the poet. Without further investigation, the headman dragged her to Pengkalan to be prosecuted. She was tied to a tree and stabbed to death with her father's *tombak* (spear). It is claimed that white blood, signifying her innocence, flowed from her body. It was during her last breath that she uttered the following curse:

May Langkawi have no peace for seven generations, may
it lie barren during this time.

The events after the tragedy, including several invasions by the Siamese and the level of poverty on Langkawi, had strengthened local people's belief in the efficacy of Mahsuri's curse. They argued that it was not until the late 1980s that development on Langkawi was clearly under way. The curse had then been lifted after Mahsuri's seventh descendant had been discovered, a 7-year-old girl who was said to be living in Southern Thailand.⁴ Prior to that, they declared, many attempts by the government to develop Langkawi had failed.

According to Barthes (1993), myth is a type of speech, a system of communication and a message. Therefore, anything could be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. In his words, "every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things" (ibid. 109). The Mahsuri legend attained the status of 'myth' when it was narrated, staged, filmed,⁵ discussed and debated. According to the Secretary of the Malaysian History Society (Kedah Branch),

⁴ *Dewan Masyarakat*, June 1990.

⁵ *Sumpah Semerah Padi* was a famous Malaysian film in the 1960s which was adapted from the Mahsuri Legend. It was directed by P. Ramlee, a famous Malaysian director who also played the leading male role in the film.

“The Mahsuri story indeed happened, according to historical artefacts, but it has become too mythical.”⁶ Indeed, the story became the ‘prey of mythical speech’ that enabled it to attain the status of myth.

The Mahsuri Mausoleum became the historical evidence of the Mahsuri legend, where Mahsuri’s grave and Mahsuri’s well were to be found. It is situated in Mawat Village, about 17 km west of Kuah town. It is separated from the villagers’ houses and paddy fields by a white brick wall and contains other objects, such as a traditional house built from wood and bamboo, and a gift shop selling all kind of handicrafts and souvenirs. Three local women sell traditional cakes (*kuih*) here. To enter the Mausoleum, visitors were charged RM 2.50 per adult and RM 1 per child. The Mahsuri tomb, which is covered with marble, is also surrounded by a white brick wall. Visitors are requested to remove their shoes to show respect. Usually, they would first visit Mahsuri’s tomb, which entailed ‘gazing’ at it and reading the information on Mahsuri’s legend, which is written on a big square of marble nearby. On most occasions, once inside Mahsuri’s tomb, tourists would be requested to lower their voices down and not to laugh. The joyful mood was suddenly changed to one of serious and solemn expression. Once they were outside the tomb, they became cheerful again; they laughed and started telling one another jokes. This mood was visibly expressed when they visited Mahsuri’s well, which was not far from the tomb. The well was alleged to have the power to cure ailments and prolong youthfulness. The rest of the visit would be spent viewing the traditional house or watching a group of local men playing traditional musical instruments. However, many tourists ended up at the gift shops to buy souvenirs for friends and family back home.

The main objects of ‘tourist gaze’ in the Mahsuri Mausoleum were those

⁶ *Dewan Masyarakat* May 1990.

constructed around local myth: Mahsuri's tomb ⁷ and Mahsuri's well. Five years ago, a new object was added to the Mausoleum. The newspaper article on the discovery of Mahsuri's seventh-generation descendant was displayed in the corner of the gift shop. The article, which included a photograph of a 7-year-old girl alleged to be this descendant, described the evidence that the efficacy of Mahsuri's curse was finally broken. The photograph showed a young girl with dark straight hair with her mother and grandmother. It had been taken at their home in Southern Thailand. Now, this article had become another tourist's attraction. Tourists visiting the Mahsuri Mausoleum would be brought to see the photograph first before going on to Mahsuri's tomb. This was one of the most important pieces of historical evidence to symbolise, at least from the local authority's point of view, the 'authenticity' of the Mahsuri story.

The Mahsuri legend is filled with the elements of romance, love, sadness, jealousy, loyalty, heroism and hatred: a series of ideas that could attract a kind of sympathy from the audience (King 1993). According to the narration, Mahsuri was an ordinary local girl who was turned into a beautiful martyr when she became a victim of injustice and was put to death. She was honest and much in love with her husband, but her generosity had been misinterpreted. The sympathy from the audience derived from her innocence, which was shown by the white blood that was alleged to have gushed out of her stomach during the execution. The 'white blood' was a symbol of goodness, innocence and purity (see also Carsten 1997) and it represented nobility (Errington 1989).

⁷ It has been argued that Mahsuri's grave had actually been transferred from the village where she was executed to the village where she was born. Therefore, it is alleged that Mahsuri's tomb is not her original grave.

Interestingly, although the association between Mahsuri's curse and the lack of development in Langkawi was still debatable,⁸ it was continually and extensively used by local tourist agencies to promote the island. This strategy could be found in almost every tourist brochure, for example:

She [Mahsuri] was unjustly accused of adultery and Mahsuri's innocence became apparent at her execution as white blood flowed from her body. In her dying breath, she laid a curse on the island that it would henceforth not prosper for seven generations. Whether rooted in legend or fact, it has only been recently that Langkawi has started to prosper again.

This association showed that the argument over whether the local myth was 'fact or fiction' was completely irrelevant. It simply seemed to be a good strategy to support the drastic changes taking place on Langkawi and also to promote a new image for the island. This seemed to be true when Ismail Yaacob, the then MP for Langkawi, said:

We should learn a lesson from Mahsuri's tragedy. Since the curse has been lifted, we should grab all the opportunities and not expect everything from the government. Look how much we've gained from Mahsuri's story. It's like a *rahmat* (blessing) that she was killed by the then Langkawi Chief. Otherwise, what are we going to tell the tourists? But we should remember that Mahsuri's legend is not enough to attract tourists to Langkawi.⁹

The Mahsuri legend had become an important element in making Langkawi a very distinctive and unique island in comparison with other tourist island resorts in Malaysia. Langkawi and Mahsuri had become synonymous and many important places on the island were named after her, such as the Mahsuri International Airport and the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre (MIEC). MIEC is a 10,000-square metre

⁸ *Dewan Masyarakat*, June 1990.

⁹ *Dewan Masyarakat* May 1990.

exhibition centre comprising an exhibition hall, a banqueting hall, a multi-purpose hall, gallery, VIP rooms, a lounge and viewing area. It was used for the Langkawi International Dialogue and the Langkawi International Motor Show '95. The centrality of the Mahsuri legend as 'historical knowledge' was enhanced by the reproduction of new tourist sites using the same discourse, that is, Eagle Square, an important new landmark on Langkawi.

Eagle Square: "You must visit, at least to take a photo"

Mahsuri's curse, which was said to be the reason for the lack of development on Langkawi, became the main concept behind the construction of Eagle Square and also the Legends on the Park. LADA, which was responsible for the construction of the square, wanted to create a landmark that would become a tourist attraction like those of Sydney and New York: 'distinctive' and having its 'own identity.' Urry (1990) argued that 'tourist objects' should be created in certain ways to achieve the 'distinctiveness', which is the essential aspect of their symbolic status (Kearns and Philo 1993). To achieve this, a new meaning and concept were ascribed to these new objects to create a new kind of myth. The landmark was built in a certain way to represent the new image of Langkawi, which was now 'free from the clutches of Mahsuri's curse and moving towards prosperity and modernity' (*North Review* 1995: 66). To express this whole concept, LADA decided to use a reddish-brown eagle, known locally as a *helang*.

This selection was said to be greatly influenced by a local legend associated with the eagle. It was told that Langkawi Island was once the arena for a contest between Phoenix, the bird of fire and Jentayu, the bird of water. This tale was alleged to be related to the origins of the Kingdom of Kedah. In ancient times, the empires of Rome and China were powerful and ambitious. To promote closer trading ties, the emperors

arranged a marriage between their children. However, the powerful Phoenix objected to the marriage plan. The great fiery bird feared that a merger between two such great powers would put an end to all the other smaller kingdoms and therefore vowed to prevent the marriage. If it failed to do so, it would banish itself from the world. So, the Phoenix abducted the Chinese princess from her boat and kept her prisoner on a remote island in Langkawi. Meanwhile, the Roman Emperor, King Solomon, entrusted Merong Mahawangsa to lead his royal fleet to China to escort the Roman prince back to Rome. However, the Phoenix attacked the ship that was transporting the prince. Jentayu, the mythical bird of water, which was summoned to defend the prince, lost its battle to the fiery Phoenix. In the commotion the prince fell into the sea and was washed ashore on the island where the princess was held captive. Soon the princess and prince were reunited on Langkawi. The Phoenix then realised that the union was the will of God, kept its vow and banished itself from the world.

With reference to this myth, the *helang*, representing the Phoenix, was selected as the new symbol and landmark of Langkawi. When I asked a local tourist officer why the *helang* was chosen, he simply told me, "It's to keep the legend alive." However, he then added:

The name Langkawi itself was derived from the word *helang*. *Lang* is the short form of *helang* and *kawi* is said to be a kind of rock (*batu*). So, Langkawi means 'eagle rock' (*batu helang*). That's why they [LADA] built this 'big rock' to be the mascot of legends.

However, there were two versions of the meaning of *kawi*. I was also told by a young local woman, who was a hotel employee, that *kawi* actually referred to a Sanskrit word meaning 'reddish-brown.' Hence, Langkawi denotes a reddish-brown eagle.

To build this landmark, a strategic location had to be chosen so that it could be seen from a distance. The town centre was suggested, which was near the Kuah Jetty, the point of entry to Langkawi by sea. Since there was not enough land available, LADA reclaimed an area of the beach near the Kuah Jetty for the site. Eventually, in 1997, the magnificent statue of a reddish-brown eagle, called Eagle Square, was completed. The statue, which depicted the eagle posed for flight, was 12 metres high by 18 metres wide. The statue overlooks the Bass straits and is the first landmark to be seen by visitors coming to Langkawi Island by ferry. The Square features two scenic ponds, bridges, an amphitheatre, covered terraces, two restaurants, two jetties and barrel vaults, which are the first to be brick-built for tourists to stroll round. It cost LADA approximately RM 14 million to build the Square, and the statue alone cost nearly RM 1.18 million (see plate 9).

Prior to the construction of this square, a symbolic meaning had already been ascribed to it. The new 'myth' had been created. The statue as expressed by LADA was not simply an eagle. It was built in such a way as to symbolise the 'speedy economic growth and progress on the island' (*North Review* 1995: 68). The depiction of the eagle with its wings outstretched for take-off into the skies symbolised that Langkawi had also taken off into a new era, an era of prosperity. As the eagle was poised for flight, so too was Langkawi poised for take-off. A local myth was reinterpreted to create a new meaning showing how Langkawi was progressing through the drastic changes from lack of 'development' towards modernisation. This reinterpretation was described in a local magazine as follows:

After having freed itself from the grip of the Legendary Mahsuri Curse, which is believed to have put the brakes on its development over the past generations, Langkawi is certainly not looking back where its growth and development are concerned. Like the sky is the limit for

the brown eagle, Langkawi has indeed found its niche in the tourism sector and nothing's going to stop Langkawi from soaring to become a leading tourist destination in the world.

(North Review 1995: 68)

This example shows how the construction of a new meaning emphasised the close association between the Langkawi of the past and the Langkawi of the 'present.' Legend, had become the link in reconstructing the new image of Langkawi. Despite, the continuing debate and scepticism regarding this legend, the strong emphasis on using it to create a new tourist object shows the local tourist board's acknowledgement of its importance in promoting on Langkawi.

'The Legends on the Park': the packaging of myths

If the Eagle Square symbolised Langkawi's freedom 'from Mahsuri's clutches', the Legend on the Park represented Langkawi's 'passage' towards modernisation. This theme park was created to recapture several local myths and legends in one area. Most of the 'original' sites of these myths were situated separately from one another. However, the selection of several myths to be constructed in this park was a clear example of the 'packaging of myths.' The park was located about 400 metres from the main jetty, side by side with Eagle Square. Its construction took about two years at an overall of RM 37 million and the park was opened to the public in 1996.¹⁰ It was built on approximately 50 acres of reclaimed land and was created on the basis of a one-stop visit, using graphic designs, sculptures and structures to depict the past myths and legends of Langkawi. The park was described as a "showcase of high tourism value that

¹⁰ It was opened to public from 9 a.m. to 11p.m. every day. It was reported that 50,000 visitors visited the park in 1996.

depicts Langkawi's storehouse of legends and myths. With this park tourists can absorb the rich and legendary heritage of Langkawi in one place."¹¹

The park was divided into eleven different sections, each representing a local myth or legend. Each section had its own gateway labelled with the name of the legend. The arrangement of the myths clearly indicated its selectivity. Each section related the myth in both Malay and English, inscribed on huge white marble slabs. Besides gazing at the myth 'objects', visitors read the details of the myth itself. At the entrance to the theme park were represented two huge rocks resembling a rocky mountain called the Gondwana Wall. This wall was built to symbolise the original formation of Langkawi Island. According to geological history, during the Cambrian period, about 500 million years ago, a large continent known as the Gondwana had occupied the South Pole region. The Gondwana then gradually broke into small landmasses, which are now said to be found in four places in the world – Africa, Australia, India and Langkawi. The Gondwana is supposed to be situated in the northwest of Langkawi Island. Based on this geological history, the Gondwana Wall was created as the entrance to the Legends on the Park. Just before the entrance, there was a welcome greeting written on a big silver plaque:

WELCOME TO LAGENDA LANGKAWI

A theme park, Lagenda Langkawi was created to recapture the glorious history of Langkawi. Lagenda Langkawi brings to life the mystifying events and romantic legends that have made Langkawi known as the 'Isle of Legends.' The subject of enchanting tales, Langkawi is a cluster of 99 islands. Folklore claimed Langkawi was the habitation of spirits while classical literature Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa related that Garuda, a giant bird, nested in these islands. The Chinese admiral, Cheng Ho, on his voyage to Malacca in 1406, recorded Langkawi on his

¹¹ Langkawi Development Authority annual report 1996, pg. 38.

map as a cluster of islands known as Lung-ya-Kiao-yi while 16th century maps described Langkawi with various names such as Langa, Langka, Langu, Langura and Langapura. Lagenda Langkawi, approximately 50 acres, is a beautiful park built on reclaimed land with man-made freshwater ponds and a lagoon. A sparkling waterway flows through the middle separating a hillview on the left from the exciting sculptural displays of the legends on the right. You can enjoy a panoramic view of the Straits of Kuah both atop the 20-foot high hill and the 40-foot high Celebration Gallery or a scenic view of the surrounding sea from the two horns of the Tanjung or Cape embracing the lagoon and the Lagenda Beach. Step into Lagenda Langkawi, a journey through history and a series of *gerbang* (gateways) will welcome you to an enjoyable passage, rich with mystifying legends and local folklore.

Passing through the first gateway, on the left-hand side just beside the river, visitors could see the first object of local myth, a sculpture of two giant hands made of concrete, seemingly involved in a fight. This sculpture was constructed to represent the myth of Mat Chincang and Mat Raya, two men who had a fight and then transformed themselves into two mountains facing each other. The mountains were Mount Raya (the highest peak on Langkawi) and Mount Mat Chinchang, and between them lay Sawar Hill. These three were believed to have the task of protecting the island from strong winds and tidal waves. According to legend, these three mountains were once human beings, playmates who shared the same mentor in the art of self-defence. Each had his own special talent and strength. One day, Mat Raya and Mat Chinchang had a difference of opinion, which led to a fight. Mat Sawar was able to stop the fight, and thereafter all three chose to transform themselves into their present forms (Ismail 1995: 1). To depict this myth, four huge hands representing the hands of Mat Raya and Mat Chincang, were constructed rising from the ground with one hand holding a *kris* (a Malay dagger with a wavy blade). The other two hands, which could have belonged to either Mat Raya or Mat Chincang, were apparently trying to defend their owner against his opponent pointing the *kris* at him. Red concrete symbolising the blood from the fight streamed down onto the ground.

The sculpture was so huge that it could be seen from across the river. The details of the myth were inscribed on a white marble with the title 'The battle of the giants: Mat Chincang and Mat Raya', located just beside the pathway for visitors to read.

After this myth section, visitors had to walk some way further to enter the next gateway, to another myth section. Only certain objects had been chosen to represent one particular myth, for example, the myth of Wet Rice Island. The interesting aspect of this myth was, as mentioned in the tourist guidebook, that local people did not know how the island acquired its name. However, to represent this myth, a *tempayan*, a large earthenware jar with a narrow mouth, had been chosen. There were three *tempayans* placed side by side, each filled with 'wet rice', which was made from small stones. One of the *tempayan*, which was broken, showed the 'wet rice' spilt onto the ground. It was observed that *tempayan* had become an important object to symbolise 'tradition' and also the 'past.' The *tempayan* was used by villagers for storing water, especially before piped water became available. Villagers would fetch water from the well and store it in a *tempayan* in the house. Sometimes a small *tempayan* would be filled with water and put near the front door for people to wash their feet before entering the house. *Tempayan* were occasionally used for storing water in the village where I stayed. In this park, next to every information point about the myth, had been placed a small empty *tempayan* at an angle. Clearly the object chosen to represent the myth was based on imagination rather than the actual story.

Towards the end of the park, visitors would approach the area that related all the myth sections with Mahsuri's legend. The first thing visitors would see was a long brown *tombak* (spear), which was said to be the same type of *tombak* that killed Mahsuri. It was called the 'Pandak Mayah spear', because it had belonged to Pandak Mayah, her father. According to the legend, her executioner had to use her family's

spear because all other weapons had failed to kill her. At the right-hand side of the spear was a bronze mural depicting a young woman, assumed to be Mahsuri, lying on the ground with a spear in her stomach. Next to the mural, which was called *Dinding wanita Mahsuri* (Lady Mahsuri's wall), was displayed the details of Mahsuri's legend under the title 'Mahsuri's execution and her curse'. This was a significant area owing to the emphasis on the association between Mahsuri's legend and the lack of development in Langkawi. The information explained how Mahsuri was killed, her curse and the effects on Langkawi for 'seven generations'. The information also seemed to link Mahsuri's curse with various invaders from the Siamese to the Japanese who occupied Langkawi in World War Two, and the British who re-colonised Langkawi after the war. It said: "Although Malaysia gained independence in 1957, Langkawi did not move along with the progress until some time in 1980s when the curse was seemingly lifted." The interpretation of the myth clearly showed the emphasis on the strong association between the Mahsuri legend and development on Langkawi. Although Japanese and British occupation were world historical events, they had been used to increase the impact of the association. A few steps ahead of this mural a circular area had been built to represent the 'Seven Generations' Curse', followed by the area that marked the end of Mahsuri's curse.

This section which was called the 'End of the Curse', was a significant stage in this 'walking tour' because it brought visitors to the area representing the 'new era' for Langkawi. The symbol was a huge modern building, which had been named metaphorically 'Celebration Gallery' and was also known as the Viewing gallery. It faced the park entrance and visitors could view the whole area of the theme park and the scenery of the capital, Kuah town, from the top of the gallery. The 'Celebration gallery' had been built as a powerful symbol of Langkawi today and the path that the island

would be following. The modern design and materials used for the building were associated with 'prosperity and modernity', which represented the 'new Langkawi.'

The park was constructed in such a way as to represent the symbolic journey that Langkawi had made since Mahsuri's execution in the seventeenth century. The effort to connect the past and the future was expressed by the numerous sculptures and structures, which had been created in several stages. The first stage of the walking-tour was the myth section, symbolising how Langkawi was developed and surrounded by 'myth and legends.' The park had been presented and reinterpreted in certain ways to portray Langkawi as coming of the lack of development and moving towards 'modernisation.' The examples above show how the landscape had been transformed into a 'mythological place.' Local and rare plants had been carefully chosen to show the connection between the legend and the plant itself. For example, the Tuba tree, which was connected to the history of Tuba Island, was chosen and also the Sekentut tree, which was linked to the story of Pulau Kentut Besar. The role of landscape in mediating between the present and the past has been widely discussed (Bender 1992; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Morphy 1995). Landscape played an important role in reinforcing the impact of the display. Morphy (1995) argues that interaction with the landscape is part of the reproduction of certain objects. The buildings and landscapes in the Legends on the Park were combined to produce an environment that presented Langkawi as distinctively mysterious, full of myths and legends, and deserving the name of Land of Legends.

Souvenirs: reproduction of the past

Previously, most of the postcards and tourist brochures portrayed the natural side of Langkawi Island, the lifestyle of local people and their daily work. One postcard showed a local farmer clearing a paddy field surrounded by vegetation another postcard showed

a group of men on a fishing boat who were preparing their fishing nets. Most postcards showed the clean beaches with fishing boats, coconut trees swaying swiftly, and a group of foreign tourists in swimsuits walking along the beach. Langkawi's strategic location as a 'getaway' from city life, was emphasised in one of the brochures, which showed two buffaloes walking past a chalet while a foreign tourist sitting outside was looking at them. As the caption stated, 'Tranquil village scenes, paddy fields and buffaloes, depict another face of Langkawi – a complete contrast to the hustle and bustle of city life.'

I argue that the new tourist site, *batu helang* (eagle rock), the new symbol of Langkawi as a tourist destination was gradually adapted for postcards, souvenirs and tourist brochures (see McKean 1977). New ranges of souvenirs based on these new tourist objects began flooding the local market. The new souvenir based on the statue was a reddish-brown eagle. Replicas proliferated in all sizes and made of different materials, ranging from small key-chain holders made of rubber to elegant versions made of crystal, carved wood and pewter. A piece of elastic cord was attached to the rubber replica so that when it was suspended, the eagle would move as though it were flying. It cost about RM 6 and was sold in small souvenir shops. Crystal and pewter replicas were sold at the airport or at the duty-free port as expensive gifts. The prices ranged from RM 10 to more than RM 100. Using the statue of the eagle for the new souvenirs was intended to portray a sense of 'Langkawiness', although most of them were actually made outside Langkawi. One postcard showed a reddish-brown eagle flying high in a blue sky with the caption: "Langkawi – Legends in the Paradise." On the back of the postcard, it read: "Brahminy kites and sea eagles roam the skies of Langkawi." The effort in emphasising this new tourist symbol of Langkawi for tourism is shown in the statement: "This brown and white-chested bird is now the symbol of Langkawi."

Another example of how local myth was used to promote tourism was the production of Mahsuri's portrait, which had become the latest object of 'tourist gaze' in the Mahsuri Mausoleum. This was a huge painting of a beautiful young woman, said to be Mahsuri, hung on the wall in one corner of a souvenir shop and close to the framed newspaper article about the discovery of her seventh-generation descendant. Mahsuri's beauty, originally based on one's imagination, had been expanded and transformed into this form of visual art. The portrait, I was told, was painted about five years ago by an artist from Penang, a state in northern Malaysia (see plate 13).

The portrait depicted Mahsuri sitting on a log in a green paddy field, clutching a basket full of paddy, and thus affirming her connection with *kampung* life. She was wearing a short black dress, although her body and arms were covered by a long well embroidered sarong that was draped around her head, revealing some of her front hair. However, surprisingly, the beautiful short purple sarong revealed her fair legs, just below the knees. This was in contrast to the local women, who would usually wear a sarong that covered their legs to the ankles.

The painting portrayed Mahsuri with certain characteristics. The two gold bangles and the dress material showed her wealthy status as the daughter-in-law of the then Chief of Langkawi. What was most spectacular about the painting was Mahsuri's features. She was portrayed as having a sharp nose, very 'seductive' eyes, and fair skin, features that symbolised nobility. Fair skin showed that she was not much exposed to the sun. In Malay society, a fair skin is often associated with beauty. Ironically, these features seemed to be in contrast with the general features of Langkawi people, at least as several tourists perceived it according to their comments. Some domestic tourists were quite amazed but others were more perceptive about her looks. I heard one young tourist in his twenties telling his friend, "If that's how Mahsuri really looked, then no

wonder she became the victim of jealousy.” He added, “She’s too beautiful for a woman of that time...if that’s true, of course every man in the village would run after her.” One tourist simply said, “She doesn’t look like Langkawi people.” When I asked the man who was selling the portraits how the artist could create the impression of what Mahsuri looked like, the man did not seem to be provided with sufficient information. However, he told me that the artist had based his impression on history and also on her descendant from Thailand. That was why, he said, Mahsuri was portrayed as having a fair and delicate skin. As a new tourist object, Mahsuri’s portrait was the obligatory subject of tourists’ photographs. It was also sold in different forms and sizes as souvenirs. Some of the souvenirs were framed and illuminated photographs costing RM 1 to RM 12 each. In addition, several books on the Mahsuri Legend were sold together with other souvenirs, costing between RM 6 and RM 12.

The above description shows how local myth was manipulated not only to reproduce new tourist objects but also to generate money. It also shows how the myth can be reinterpreted in many ways to produce new meaning that could alter people’s perceptions about the new object produced. It has been argued that the interpretation of the past and the production of new objects can result in the production of something new that transforms our understanding of the objects, resulting in the creation of new meaning (Tilley, Hamilton & Bender 2000). It is also possible to argue here that these new tourist objects had been ‘commoditised’ (Greenwood 1989; Cohen 1988) although it was observed that the ‘authenticity’ of these new tourist objects seemed less important to tourists because they already knew that the objects were not ‘authentic’. Although the products or souvenirs were not actually locally made, tourists still bought them because the image used represented ‘Langkawiness’. One tourist showed me the T-shirt that she had bought for her son, who wanted a T-shirt with the picture of a *helang* on it. When I looked at the label and told her that it was not made locally, it did not surprise her. In

fact she told me, "It doesn't matter, as long as there is a picture of a *helang* on it. They [children and friends] just want something bought on Langkawi."

The Past as New Myth

A vast literature explores the way in which the evidence of the past is used, viewed and interpreted by individual societies at specific points in their development or in their activities (see Gathercole & Lowenthal 1994). On Langkawi, local myths, which could be considered the 'past', were a means of producing new tourist objects with new 'myth.' They were used to link the Langkawi of the past and the Langkawi of the present. The new objects of tourist gaze, Eagle Square and the Legends on the Park manifested a strong sense of the past in the present, rather than the past cut off from the present. Saint-Cassia (1999) suggests that the past tends increasingly to be represented in sites, evoked as nostalgia and protected as heritage, and that tourism as a modern form of the 'universal exhibition' of the nation state is an important component of this process. He also argues that memory and recollection are actively evoked in the construction and transmission of such 'tradition' not just by performing rituals but also by using space and buildings (ibid. 259). This continual interaction between myth and local tourism has therefore strengthened the association between local myth and the development of Langkawi, despite some scepticism that has been expressed about it. As Hodder states, "The past is the present in the sense that our reconstruction of the meaning of data from the past is based on analogies with the world around us" (1982: 9).

Local myths were consciously manipulated and reinterpreted and new meanings were ascribed to the new objects. This new myth interpretation, which became very subjective, would then be adapted for tourist brochures for tourist consumption. Dann (1988) argues that brochures are themselves myths, whose ideological function is to

transform images of destinations into texts with ideologically potent meaning for tourists.

The power of the local authority in designating the area as possessing historical significance and hence in 'commodifying' the environment should not be underestimated (Meethan 1996: 186). Not only has it the means to construct and present the past but also to form attitudes and alter interpretations of it (Addyman 1994). Addyman points out that the more effectively the past is presented, the more fundamentally it can change people's perceptions of their historic environment, of themselves and their patterns of life (ibid. 257). On Langkawi, the reproduction of local myths is heavily dependent on the power of the local tourist authority. It was argued that objects of gaze were socially organised and systematised and that the local government controlled what tourist should gaze at (Urry 1990; Pemberton 1994). Urry further argues that it is the local government, with the help of experts, which constructs and develops the objects of gaze for tourists. This includes the selection of 'objects' and the image that is to be presented to tourists.

The construction of the Eagle Square was in fact said to be the idea of Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysian prime minister. In Indonesia, it was Mrs Soeharto, the Indonesian president's wife, who gave the inspiration to the Indonesian government to build the "Beautiful Indonesia"-in-Miniature Park (*Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*). She asserted that her inspiration was the result of her visit to Disneyland (see Pemberton 1994). On Langkawi, the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), on behalf of the federal government, was fully responsible for the development of these new tourist sites. It was the responsibility of LADA to select the type of local myth to be presented and the strategic places that were to be converted for tourist consumption. Both Eagle Square and the Legends on the Park were under the management of and solely supported by

LADA. The Park Unit, which was under the LADA administration, was responsible for the cleanliness, landscaping, promotion, maintenance and engineering of the two parks.

The reproduction, in the form of artefacts and structures was intended to emphasise the mythical aspect and uniqueness of Langkawi Island as a legendary island. This image was declared to be an important element in promoting Langkawi as a famous tourist destination in Malaysia. I have explored how the local tourist authority exploited the myths to portray this aspect of Langkawi, as evidenced by the construction of new objects of 'tourist gaze' such as Eagle Square and the Legends on the Park.

Although LADA make great efforts to link the mythical past to the present, this seems to be neither very important nor effective in attracting tourists to visit these sites. I argue that no matter how interesting the meaning, it was observed that it seemed to be confined to the articulation of LADA and the local authorities. This was evidenced by the response of local people and tourists when they were asked for their opinion on their trip to the Legend on the Park and Eagle square. Local people and even tourists had a very limited knowledge of the concept and meaning constructed and ascribed by the tourist authority to these new tourist objects. The most that local people can say about why *helang* was chosen as the symbol of Langkawi, was because it was related to the name of Langkawi. When I asked one local taxi driver why *helang* was chosen for the big statue, he said, "because Langkawi also means *helang*."

Langkawi people refer to the eagle statue as *batu Lang* (eagle rock) and the visit to the Eagle Square is called "see the Lang" (*tengok helang*). They emphasised that the *batu Lang* was a "must-visit" place for tourists because "you can't find it in other places" (*tempat lain tak ada*). They seemed eager to persuade either tourists, or their relatives who visited them on Langkawi, to visit the *batu Lang*. During the first month

that I was in Langkawi, I was asked several times whether or not I had been to Eagle Square. When I said that I did not have time yet to go, one of my informants seemed to be quite surprised and insisted that I should go there. However, I was also surprised by his response when I asked him what was interesting about the Square. He said, "There's nothing much really, only the *batu Lang*. But you can take photos there. A lot of tourists go there just to take photos because they want only the photo of the eagle." My neighbour often used to persuade every tourist that he met to go and visit the *batu helang* because, he said, "It would be such a waste not to go there when you're already on Langkawi." For local people, a trip to Langkawi would be incomplete if one did not visit Eagle Square. That might explain why questions such as, "Have you seen the Lang?" or "Have you taken a photo of the Lang?" were so often put to tourists. At one point, the Eagle rock had been viewed by some individuals as a 'worship rock' (*batu berhala*) owing to the eagerness of local tourist operators and tourist guides in promoting these sites to tourists.

In the Legends on the Park, tourists were usually left alone to wander about. Some of them avoided entering the gateways to view the myths but instead sat on a bench near the river to view the scenery. Mostly, only young visitors would climb the stairs to go to the top of the gallery to admire the view or take photographs. Their conversations were more general. They discussed how big and real the sculptures were. Tourist guides admitted that tourists, particularly domestic tourists, were not much interested in visiting the park, especially the second-timers, because it was too far to walk to cover the whole area.

I argue that in Langkawi, the visit to historical sites was not so much about the 'consumption of myth' as fulfilling one's own curiosity. This was evidenced by the visits to the Legend on the Park. It was observed that this curiosity was markedly strong

in the first-time tourists to the Park, where they were seen gazing upon a set of different scenes or landscapes which are out of the ordinary (Urry 1990). However, when their curiosity had been fulfilled, then the desire to revisit the place was lessened. Since a visit to the Legends on the Park entailed a walk of 2 to 3 kilometres along a pathway, transport could be hired for those who could not manage it. However, the charge of RM 12 per trolley was often asserted by tourist to be expensive. For those who could walk, it could take about one to two hours to cover the whole area. One domestic tourist, who had just finished her tour of the Park, catching her breath and desperately looking for somewhere to sit down, told me, "There's nothing special actually. It's very exhausting because it's very far to walk to the end of the park. Once is enough. I would rather go shopping than just walking and looking at those objects."

Another local tourist told me, "I just want to see what's in it. Since I'm already here, it's better to see it. At least I can tell my friends that I've been to this place. After this, I don't think I would visit again." In fact, a local taxi driver said to me, "Tourists don't want to go to the historical sites. It's boring. They come to Langkawi not for that but for the beaches. Foreign tourists like the beaches to relax, while domestic tourists normally like to go shopping." The impression that Langkawi had 'nothing to offer' was expressed by a young local shopkeeper. He said, "There is nothing much in Langkawi. Yes, now we have the Square and the Park but they [the tourists] will visit only once. They get bored with those objects."

The tour seems to be based on the tourists' search for a vision of the 'whole' of the city. In Langkawi, the tourists' visit to the park entailed viewing and touring its many section of the myths. But in many cases, the tour consisted mostly of tourists being photographed with the myth objects and landscapes rather than reading the information about the myth. A group of domestic tourists from the city, mostly in their mid-twenties,

had just arrived on the island and were visiting Eagle Square as the first item of their island tour. Their first impression of the eagle was its huge size. One young tourist excitedly told his friend about the huge size of the statue and its beautiful scenery. He then went to the top of the square and started looking for the best angle from which to take a photograph. He then shouted to his other friend to ask his first friend's opinion on the best position to take a photograph. One of his friends went to the corner, to read the information about the statue. Meanwhile, his other friends were just standing behind the statue and taking photographs. He then urged his friend who was reading the information to be quick, saying, "[You] don't need to read it, that's not important." Being photographed in front of the statue would be proof of their visit.

The above discussion shows that the reproduction of new tourist objects aimed at presenting the mythical aspect of Langkawi did not seem to have a marked effect on tourists. Cohen (1988) argued that there were different types of tourists. The tourists who came to Langkawi were looking for 'mere recreation'; they were not seekers of mythological structures.

The Rhetoric of *Pembangunan* (development)

I have discussed the extensive power of local and federal government, specifically LADA in making decisions as to what tourist objects should be produced through the manipulation of local myths. This extensive power of the local and federal government can also be manifested through the way the word *pembangunan* (development) is being 'exploited'. In Langkawi, the word *pembangunan* (development) seems to be the magic tool to bring the island from 'its long isolation from development'. On many occasions, the previous economic situation of Langkawi was constantly emphasized to explain the reasons why the government has been so keen to bring *pembangunan* to the island.

Langkawi people were claimed to be lucky (*bertuah*) as they could finally experience *pembangunan* and therefore should give their full support and to participation to it. These statements were reiterated in every speech given by politicians, developers and government officials. Larsen (1998) describes how local villagers on one of the islands in Kedah used the opposing states to perceive development: 'not yet developed' (*belum membangun*) and 'developed' (*membangun*). In Langkawi, there is also a similar tendency to use these opposing states to describe the state of development on the island.

This can be manifested by the articulation of one villager when he said, "you can see now that Langkawi is slowly developing (*membangun*), previously there was no *pembangunan* at all". The words 'not developed' (*tidak membangun*) and 'developed' (*membangun*) have been used to differentiate the two different eras that Langkawi has gone through since nearly two decades ago. Similar to what Larsen (1998) has argued, *pembangunan* is used by local villagers to describe the construction of physical infrastructure and modern-type buildings. This can be manifested in the articulation of local people when they associate *pembangunan* with new buildings and structures. One local man said to me, "previously all these places used to be forest but now they have been replaced by steel and brick buildings".

Hobart (1993) argues that *pembangunan* which is taken from the root word *bangun* which means 'get up or build', is extensively employed by government officials and developers to stress economic and social progress in a particular area or region. In Langkawi, the same word *pembangunan* is constantly used by people everywhere, be they state leaders, developers, local authority officials, politicians or simply local village people. Every plan of *pembangunan* was emphasized to be of benefit to the local people. The representatives in these authoritative positions constantly urged the local people of Langkawi to 'develop the island together' (*menbangunkan bersama-sama*) with them to

achieve their dream to see the island modernized. This kind of statement such as “let us develop this island together” (*mari kita bangunkan pulau Langkawi ini bersama-sama*) was often articulated by local authorities and local political leaders within their political campaigns or was frequently reiterated in the local newspapers. Local people were encouraged to ‘participate together’ (*melibatkan diri bersama-sama*) in the local tourism industry by taking every business opportunity available in the market.

Since the majority of the population of Langkawi are Malays, the association of *pembangunan* with the development of the Malay people (*orang Melayu*) has been strongly emphasized. The use of this type of Malay nationalism can be manifested in the articulation of the local authorities and individuals in positions of leadership. Thus such statements as “...*kerajaan* (the government) is giving the opportunity to Malay people in Langkawi to be involved in *perniagaan* (business) and become *usahawan* (entrepreneurs)” have been constantly articulated by these people in authority. Shamsul argues that the Malay nationalists tend to use the same terms such as *pembangunan* (development), *kemajuan* (progress) and commerce (*perniagaan*) ‘to describe the economic interest, predicament and future of the Malays in the ‘envisioned Malay nation’ (1997: 241). They have been constantly reminded of the fact that it was due to the efforts of local government that *pembangunan* was made possible on the island and that an explicit concern of the government was to upgrade and improve the socioeconomic community of the local Malays. As Quarles Van Ufford points out, “this process (development) does not realize itself automatically, but needs outside action or encouragement. So the process of development cannot realize itself if careful guiding and cultivation do not take place’ (citing Hobart 1993:7).

All these articulations gave a strong indication to local people that they were expected to be involved in the development process from the very beginning. They were

given the impression that they could have access to not only the resources available but also play an active role in the decision-making process. However, these objectives and policies by those in authority have not been realized in practical terms in the case of Langkawi. Local people were often excluded from participation in the decision making process, and were often not consulted but were then expected to accept the decisions made by the authorities. These same authorities claimed that meetings were often held with local villagers either to inform them of future projects or to obtain a collective opinion from the local people. However, the nature of their hierarchical relationship with these village groups often turned such meetings into meetings of 'instruction' (*arahan*) rather than constructive discussion (*perbincangan*). As a result, local villagers functioned as no more than passive observers.

The absence of effort by the developers to take account of the knowledge of local people has been strongly criticized by Hobart (1993). Anthropologists have argued that local knowledge should not only be acknowledged but treated seriously and used to examine the importance of contributions to the welfare of local people (Hobart 1993). Obviously in this case, the development rhetoric as articulated by those people who have the most power in the decision-making process is distinctly different from the reality. It is known that all development plans are totally controlled by the local authorities. In the case of Langkawi, LADA (Langkawi Development Authority) has the most power in not only coordinating and monitoring the development process but also in the decision-making process.

However, from my own observation, although local people did not have access to the process of decision-making, they were gradually making varying degrees of effort to become involved in local business. These efforts by local Malays were seen by many as much slower than those of the other local ethnic groups such as the Chinese, for

example, who mostly resided in urban areas and already possessed an expertise in business. However, some of them claimed that the Chinese gained more from the *pembangunan* because they had this experience, knowledge and expertise although they were still not quite sure to what extent this was of benefit to them. There were also claims that Malay entrepreneurs from outside Langkawi, who possessed more capital than locals did, got more opportunities to set up their own business or to develop certain areas in Langkawi.

Shamsul (1997) argues that there is a significant difference between rural-based entrepreneurs and urban-based entrepreneurs particularly in terms of their standard of education. He argues that contemporary entrepreneurs, who are generally wealthy, are not homogenous internally and comprise two groups. The first group is the 'old manually oriented middle class most of whom are rural-based (Shamsul 1997: 252). This group comprises individuals who have little or no previous background in business. He calls these individuals the 'accidental entrepreneurs' while the 'new' educationally-oriented middle class are based in urban areas and involved in various types of special education programmes. Almost all of the entrepreneurs in Langkawi initially started as 'accidental' entrepreneurs before establishing themselves as entrepreneurs. However, urban entrepreneurs often get more opportunities compared to local entrepreneurs who have less experience and available capital.

The process of exclusion of local people was manifested during the process of land acquisition of one area that involved a group of local chalet businessmen. Local villagers perceive that *pembangunan*, also means the development of the Malay people. For them, *pembangunan* should also mean the improvement of their existing standard of living. Any development plan should not be seen as real *pembangunan* if it does not ameliorate their existing economic status. Therefore, when a group of local businessmen

who were considered to be among the pioneers in the chalet business were asked to abandon their businesses and leave their land, local people began to question the actual aims and objectives of *pembangunan* for them.

The government's spirit of Malay nationalism which local people assumed was meant to help the *orang melayu* (Malay people) began to be questioned. As one local man argued, "...they (the government) should help us (the Malay people) and not destroy us (by destroying our businesses)". However, the local man claimed that local people did not have enough power to express their concerns or to question the government's decisions because they would quickly be labeled as anti-*pembangunan* or indirectly as anti-government. Abram acknowledges this dilemma when he states, "when the subject of development objects to the assumptions and notions held by the developers, their objections are usually ruled out unless they can translate them into the terms set by the developers" (1998: 6).

Based on my observations, the disagreement with some of the government's policies does not necessarily indicate that local people were against *pembangunan*. As one of them said, "it's good that the government brings development to Langkawi but they should ensure that local people get the benefit from it". Most of the local people were aware of the development rhetoric used by those in power to fulfil their personal or political interests. They also realized that *pembangunan* may cause disadvantages to a certain group of people in the community. Despite all of these claims by different groups of people in Langkawi, almost all of them, including those who criticized the government for what had happened to their neighbours, friends or relatives, still held the general opinion that *pembangunan* would be beneficial to them. They in fact claimed that they might only get a small share from the development but were happy with the construction of public infrastructures, which have made their life much easier than

before. This same language or idea of development, which has been associated with the construction of physical infrastructure, may explain why the majority of Langkawi people are still in favour of with *pembangunan*.

Chapter 4

Tourists – Local Interactions

This chapter is concerned with the interaction between tourists and the villagers of Kg Senang. It describes the activities of both tourists and villagers, and the villagers' attitudes towards tourists and their strategies in dealing with them. The nature of the host-guest contact and its consequences has received a great deal of attention in the study of tourism (Smith 1989; Cohen 1971). Pearce (1988) has argued that the encounter between them has led to a positive attitudinal change. However, other researchers have argued that this has not been necessarily true (Milman and Pizam 1990) but has possibly had the opposite effect. These different results manifest the possibility of different factors affecting the encounters. Pearce (1988) has also argued that the encounter between tourists and their hosts has only confirmed their previous attitudes towards each other, regardless of whether these attitudes were positive or negative. Other researchers (Cohen 1972; Fisher & Price 1991) have argued that the positive results have been determined by the individuals' motivation to interact with one another. Cultural background such as languages, values and philosophies were also among the influential factors (Taft 1977).

The intensity of the encounter and its results also varied according to the type of tourists and tourism (Boissevain 1996). For example, organised tours provided fewer opportunities for direct and meaningful contact with local people than independent tours (Hitchcock 1993). The aim of this chapter is to show that by understanding tourists' aims and viewing tourists as an 'economic asset,' the villagers of Kg Senang began to practise certain flexibility towards the behaviour of some of them.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the aims and activities of tourists. I argue that the types of tourism promoted in Langkawi and the structured schedule resulted in fewer interactions with local villagers. The tourist activities brought tourists into contact with only certain groups of local people, particularly those who worked directly in tourism-related services, such as tourist operators, chalet or hotel managers, tourist guides, local shop owners and hotel employees. Therefore, the contact with local villagers could be described as very brief and superficial, mostly comprising silent dialogue rather than verbal interaction. However, this does not mean that tourist activities were totally separated from the daily life of local villagers, and it also seems that the villagers themselves were trying to avoid contact with tourists.

Section two deals with local perceptions of tourists. I argue that the villagers' understanding of tourists' aim and the perception of tourists as an 'economic asset' to local tourism created a certain tolerance of their behaviour. I maintain that both the villagers and the tourists needed a certain amount of privacy, so an unwritten rule – "You don't disturb us, we shan't disturb you" was developed. This explains the lack of open resentment towards tourists when the villagers began to employ the attitude of "mind your own business." This is also related to the fact that local villagers could have their own leisure activities and at the same time share the tourist facilities. However, I argue that the tolerance shown to foreign tourists was not extended to domestic tourists, particularly the Malays. The Malay tourists, who came from outside Langkawi had a similar culture to that of the villagers, and were therefore expected to adhere to local values. I begin the first section by discussing the type of tourism promoted by the local agencies, the type of tourists and the tourists' motivations.

Tourism in Langkawi: 'Beach and Islands'

A study of the Malaysian Island resorts suggested that environmental attraction was given consistently high ratings by international tourists compared with cultural attraction and attraction based on tourist facilities. The two most attractive items were climate and scenery. Langkawi Island, which came second in attractiveness, was among the three islands in Malaysia that were the destinations most preferred by tourists. The Malaysian government launched a new strategy of promoting each tourist destination with a particular theme. Penang, for instance, represented cultural tourism while Kuala Lumpur, the capital city, was promoted as a shopping centre. Malacca was promoted for its historical sites and Langkawi represented 'islands and beaches.' As a new tourist destination, the promotion of Langkawi was based on its environmental attraction. According to Smith's typology of tourism (1989), Langkawi could be categorised as 'recreational tourism', in which the tourist could enjoy 'sun, sand and sea' for relaxation and sports recreation such as jet-skiing, snorkelling, scuba diving and island tours. This theme and the historical legends of the island were an appealing combination in attracting tourists and so the tourist activities centred on these two assets.

The existence of historical sites related to the Mahsuri legend, which are scattered about on Langkawi Island, created the 'Round Island' trip. It was a must for tourists, especially the first-time visitors to the island. It featured sites of 'historical significance' and natural beauty as well as those, which reflected 'modern' recreation such as the Underwater World. The trip included a visit to several historical places such as the Mahsuri Mausoleum, comprising Mahsuri's tomb and Mahsuri's Well, the Field of Burnt Rice (*Beras Terbakar*), the Black Sand Beach (*Pantai Pasir Hitam*) and the Hot Spring Well (*Telaga Air Hangat*). Most of these tourist sites were self-contained and surrounded by a huge, high wall separating them from the villagers' houses. In many

areas, the villages were still far away from the main areas of tourist attractions. These historical sites are not far from one another, normally about 15 - 20 minutes' drive. The inclusive trip took about three hours.

The development of new tourist attractions such as a theme park, sports recreation, Galeria Perdana, Cultural Kraft Centre, Underwater World and Book Village were added to the 'Round Island' trip. Tourists travelled by bus (tour group), taxi (car or van), or motorcycle. A bus was normally used for tourists who came in a large group and a van was popular for those who were in a group of eight to ten people and also for family trips. Renting a car or van was the best option for those who wanted to take their time to visit the tourist sites and who preferred an unstructured visit. The cost of hiring a cab or van with driver was between RM 12 and RM15 per person and between RM 80 and RM 150 for a hired car. Motorcycle and bicycle were mainly popular among foreign tourists, because it was the best transport for those who wanted to enjoy the local scenery. Domestic tourists preferred to go by hired car or taxi because they said that it was too hot to ride a bicycle or motorcycle on the island. I was told that cycling and riding a motorcycle had become a favourite with foreign tourists because they loved the hot weather. As one rental bicycle owner told me, "They have always wanted to have a darker skin like us. So they do not mind riding a bike around the island."

'Island hopping' was a trip by boat to the nearest three islands: Island of the Pregnant Maiden, Isle of Wet Rice and Singa Besar Island. Tourists were brought to the islands for sightseeing and swimming. This trip would take about four hours and each person would be charged between RM 30 and RM 40. There were two trips available daily: from 9 a.m. until 1.00 p.m., and from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m. The boat trip to the marine park on Payar Island, off the south coast of Langkawi island, took about 45 minutes. Upon arrival, tourists would be brought to the catamaran mooring at a 49m x

15m reef platform built off Payar Island. This platform had an underwater observatory and glass-bottomed boat that allowed a close-up view of the coral. Tourists could also do snorkelling and scuba diving. This activity was considered 'exclusive', especially for the domestic tourists who came with their families, because the trip was quite expensive at RM 120 to 150 per person.¹ The trip would normally take about four to five hours, and tourists would depart from Langkawi Island at 9.00 a.m. and return at 1 p.m.

Tourists also came to Langkawi to attend various international events organised by LADA (Langkawi Development Authority), such as the Langkawi International Maritime Aerospace (LIMA) and Tour de Langkawi. LIMA was a biennial event, which was started in 1991 and hosted by the Malaysian government. During the time of my fieldwork, Malaysia became the host for the 1998 Commonwealth Sea Games and Langkawi was chosen by the Prime Minister as the venue for the shooting event. These international events attracted many tourists, both international and domestic, to the island.

Types of Tourists

For Langkawi people, tourists could be divided into four categories: Western tourists including those from the United States and Europe; tourists from neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Brunei; tourists from East Asia such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan; and domestic tourists. For the majority of Langkawi people, foreign tourists particularly those from Europe and the United States, regardless of their nationality were in the same category: *mat saleh* or 'white people' (*orang putih*). They were simply identified by Langkawi people as *pelancung orang*

¹ It is reported that 67, 167 foreign tourists visited Payar Island compared to only 23, 174 domestic tourists (Langkawi Information Centre 1997).

putih ('white people' tourists) or *pelancung mat saleh*. *Mat saleh* is a general term used by the Malays to refer to Europeans.

Their perceptions that Europeans had 'white skin' (*kulit putih*) meant that they were called 'white people' and these 'white people' were often assumed to originate from one country – 'white people' country (*negeri orang putih*). The majority of the villagers were unaware that these foreign tourists might be originating from different countries and therefore have different cultures. These foreign tourists experienced the 'loss of individuality' (Pi-Sunyer 1989) when they were viewed as a group and not individually. Pi-Sunyer argued that the application of traditional stereotypes or 'the loss of individuality' would be automatic, particularly where the length of residence was short and the number of visitors was high. Local people found it very difficult to differentiate between Italians, French, Germans, etc. Only those in regular contact with tourists could differentiate between the nationalities according to the language spoken.

Unlike the tourists from Europe, those from neighbouring countries and East Asia were normally identified according to their nationality, such as *pelancung Jepun* (Japanese tourists), *pelancung Taiwan* (Taiwanese tourists) etc. However, the villagers sometimes had difficulty in differentiating between the Taiwanese, Singaporeans and domestic Chinese, owing to the similar 'Chinese features.' Domestic tourists could be divided into three categories based on the different ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese and Indian. They were normally identified as the Chinese (*orang Cina*), the Malays (*orang Melayu*) and the Indians (*orang India*). To differentiate between the foreign tourists (*pelancung asing*) and the domestic tourists (*pelancung tempatan*), the latter were sometimes called *pelancung sini* (lit. tourists of this place, which also means Malaysian tourists). On many occasions, the villagers would refer to domestic tourists as *pelancung kita* or *orang kita* (lit. 'our tourists' or 'our people'). Interestingly, they tended to use

orang kita ('our people') to refer to domestic tourists when discussing foreign tourists but distanced themselves from the domestic tourists by referring to them as *orang luar* (outsiders) when the discussion moved to issues between the villagers as Langkawi people and outsiders.

Tourists' Aims

Tourists came to Langkawi for various reasons, among which were holiday/leisure, business, incentive travel, visiting friends and relatives, conferences,² etc. In 1996, 92.8 percent of tourists came to Langkawi on holiday/leisure and 2.3 percent on business.³ Langkawi had become a famous tourist destination for family vacations and to visit friends and relatives, particularly for domestic tourists during school and public holidays. Most domestic tourists came with their families, and the chalets provided suitable and affordable accommodation for them. Domestic tourists normally stayed an average of two nights and more than 50 per cent of them were repeat visits. They stayed in hotels, chalets or with friends or relatives. When staying with relatives, board, lodging and transport were provided by the host family. Foreign tourists, however, usually came with their spouses or friends and stayed for an average of four nights. About 85.5 per cent of foreign tourists were first-time visitors to Langkawi.⁴

² Langkawi is a famous destination for conferences or seminars organised not only by government bodies but also by international companies for their employees. Many hotels are specifically designed to cater for this kind of activity.

³ Departing Visitors Survey 1996, Research Division, Malaysia Board of Tourism.

⁴ Departing Visitors Survey 1996.

Interaction between Tourists and Local Villagers

I argue that the typology of tourism comprising different kinds of tourist activities influenced the degree of interaction between tourists and local people. When discussing tourist-resident 'contact', the meaning of contact itself should be clearly defined, for it can take many forms. It can mean touching (physical contact), eye contact which may or may not lead to communication, contact via another medium such as the telephone, radio or letter that may not entail a face-to-face encounter. It was observed that on Langkawi, encounters between villagers and tourists were limited to eye contact without any interaction.

The fact that tourists normally had a very short stay and had structured programme meant that they had less time to interact with the villagers. Normally the tourists would spend two to three nights at a hotel or in the chalets and programme had been arranged prior to the visits. Tourist activities were almost separate from the daily lives of the local people, although the latter were not trying to avoid tourists. The following example shows how both worlds existed but were quite separate.

I had several opportunities to experience this when invited by Nadia, a local tourist guide, to assist her with the tour group. While I was a tour guide 'assistant', I noticed that the activities were structured according to the itineraries of the various trips: the best places to visit, and the time to be allocated so as to cover all the tourist sites before they closed. One day I was asked by Nadia to join her in guiding a group of 25 domestic tourists from Kuala Lumpur. The group comprised employees from a Kuala Lumpur company, which gave a special discount for the trip, a three-night stay at five-star hotel, as part of their annual bonus. I was told that the company subsidised each person by RM 222 to cover accommodation and the cost of travel from Kuala Lumpur.

Additional expenses were the responsibility of the individual. On Saturday morning, Nadia and I drove to Kuah Jetty to greet the group which had departed from Kuala Lumpur by bus at 10.30 p.m. the previous night and was due to arrive at 8.30 a.m. At the jetty, Nadia met Zain, the bus driver, who had already been waiting for the group since 8.00 a.m. About 8.45 a.m. the ferry bringing the group from Kuala Kedah drew up alongside the jetty, and the tourists, who were looking very tired, disembarked.

Despite the long journey, they seemed cheerful on arriving in Langkawi. One young man in his early twenties showed his excitement by shouting, "Yes, welcome to Langkawi!" ignoring the people who were looking at him. The trip brought together co-workers and friends from different states of Malaysia, totalling 25 people more or less equally divided between men and women. The group was a mixture of ethnic identities: one Indian couple, five Chinese and eighteen Malays, all aged between early twenties and mid-forties. The group began making jokes to celebrate their arrival as they boarded the bus, and continued in this vein throughout the journey. Nadia, who was wearing a red *baju kurung*, picked up the microphone and began her job that day by introducing herself to the group and letting them know that she would be their tour guide during their stay on the island. Nadia gave a briefing on the programme for that day and for the next three days of their stay, while the bus was in motion. The 'Round Island' trip, as she explained to the group, was a visit to several historical sites, which had been selected prior to their arrival, around the island. It would include two historical sites (the Field of Burnt Rice and the Mahsuri Mausoleum) the recreation centre (Underwater World), Galeria Perdana and the shopping centre. Since the schedule was so tight, she reminded the group to be punctual in returning to the bus at the time agreed. To ensure that everybody followed the rule but at the same enjoyed their trip, Nadia suggested that whoever was caught arriving late would be punished by having to sing a song in front of the group. Her suggestion was welcomed with excitement and applause from the

tourists. A 'monitor' was then required as a representative of the group to deal with the tour guide if any problems arose, and they agreed to select Lily, a young Chinese woman and a secretary of the company.

The bus then took us to the hotel, about five minutes' drive from the jetty, where the group could check in and have their luggage taken to their rooms. Fearing that the group might not be ready on time, the suggestion by one young lady in the group that one could change or have a wash was rejected by Nadia, for she had to start the trip as soon as possible to cover all the sites before the closing time. We departed from the hotel about 9.30 a.m. and started our 'Round Island' trip by heading towards the first historical site, the Field of Burnt Rice (*Beras Terbakar*). During the journey, Nadia, who was standing in the aisle at the front, microphone in hand, started narrating the history of Langkawi Island and related the Mahsuri legend to the island's development. She explained how Mahsuri's curse affected development and how Langkawi had begun to develop after the curse had been lifted by the birth of her seventh descendant in 1986. Since they had all heard the stories several times, they did not seem to be interested in listening to Nadia's narration. One young man in his early twenties began to distract Nadia when he said to his friend that he knew the story. When Nadia asked him what he was saying, he replied, "I've already heard that, we want other stories." Nadia did tell me that domestic tourists did not like listening to history because they had heard it since they were small. Young domestic tourists preferred to listen to jokes and love stories, which were related to Mahsuri Legend, or even just singing. As Nadia said, "They [the domestic tourists] do not want a serious or sad story. They just want to have fun, not gain information." This was different from the foreign tourists who liked to know more about the Mahsuri legend and in fact expressed their sadness when listening to it.

Half an hour later, we made the first stop at the Field of Burnt Rice. The site was claimed to be the remains of a Siamese invasion in the middle of the seventeenth

century. It was told that during the invasion, the villagers stored their rice in an underground chamber to prevent access to it by the Siamese. When the Siamese soldiers discovered the villagers' plan to poison them, they burned down the village, including the rice chamber. It was asserted that traces of burnt rice had been seen, especially after heavy rain. Upon our arrival at the site, we were given about one hour to visit it and buy souvenirs in the shops. It took us five minutes' walk to reach the site, which was a small field with one big signboard showing the name of the place. The group began looking for the burnt rice by digging up the soil with a dry twig. Beside the field, a bowl of burnt rice was on display in a locked glass case, especially for those who could not find any, to show them what it looked like. Even though a few of them had been to the site before, they still appeared to be very excited at joining in the digging. Suddenly, one of the tourists shouted that she had found the burnt rice. But her friend, the same young man who had liked making jokes on the bus, said laughingly that the rice might not be original; someone could have burnt ordinary rice at home and strewed it over the field to look like the original burnt rice. He said that this was done to replace the original burnt rice, which no longer existed to attract tourists. However, Nadia, who looked carefully at the burnt rice, was convinced that it was the original version. After spending half an hour looking for the rice, everybody then started to take photographs in front of the signboard of the Field of Burnt Rice to record the fact of their 'being there'.

Ten minutes earlier, five women from the group had just taken some photographs and then ventured out to the souvenir shops, which were built along the path to the site. The path itself was routed in such a way as to allow tourists to pass all these shops before reaching the field. There were about twenty to thirty shops, which were run mostly by local people. Interestingly, the shops, not only at this site but also at all other tourist sites, were selling almost the same range of items: *batik* sarong, *batik* casual

wear, sea-slug oil, keychains and other small souvenirs. Since Nadia knew most of the sellers, the tourists were given a discount on the items that they bought.

Leaving the Field of Burnt Rice, we travelled for another 20 minutes until 11.30, when the bus made its second stop at the Mahsuri Mausoleum. Since seven of them said that they had been there before, they showed no interest in entering the site, whose entrance fee was RM 2 per person. Instead, they spent their time at the shops outside the Mahsuri Mausoleum in buying souvenirs and traditional medicine. In the Mahsuri tomb, Nadia brought us to where a newspaper article on the discovery of Mahsuri's seventh descendant was displayed on a board for the tourists. Everybody seemed to be listening to Nadia, who was trying to explain the article.

After this Nadia brought us to a place which was said to be Mahsuri's well. Since it had been raining earlier that day, the well was full of water. Nadia jokingly suggested that since the group had not had their morning shower, they might like to use the water to wash their faces. She told them that the water was believed to have the 'power' to maintain youthfulness, which caused some excitement. Although some of the group was quite sceptical about it, they made a joke of it and teased their friends, especially the older ones, into washing their faces with the water so that they would look younger. They seemed to be enjoying themselves.

After that we went to visit a wooden house, which represented the local traditional accommodation. Only two or three members of the group entered the house while the rest sat down outside, for they said that they had seen the place before. Inside the house was a group of five old men aged 50 and 65 performing a '*Marhaban*.' ⁵ A *Marhaban* was normally performed to welcome the birth of a child. At first I did not

⁵ *Marhaban* is a koranic chanting with a special rhythm performed by a group of people.

know what they were doing because no one in the group seemed to be interested in asking. One of the old men, who lived in a village near the Mahsuri Mausoleum, told me that they were employed by the Mahsuri Mausoleum management and were paid RM 2.50 per hour. They performed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with an hour's break for lunch. Some of the tourists who had not entered the house were seen to gather together with their friends and start talking about their boss's character and their other colleagues.

By the time we had finished our visit to the Mahsuri Mausoleum, it was already 1.30 p.m. Nadia suggested that we should stop at a restaurant to have lunch. The restaurant had been booked earlier by Nadia, so by the time we arrived, the meal was ready for us. The group was took their seats while Lily was busy discussing with Nadia how to arrange the menu with the restaurant proprietor. While waiting for their lunch to be served, the group, who were seated at two tables, were making jokes, teasing one another, and talking about their workload, office gossip and the things that they would buy for their families.

After lunch, we then headed to the Galeria Perdana, a repository of gifts received by the Malaysian Prime Minister.⁶ The group was left to view the gallery while Nadia stayed outside the building, smoking cigarettes. After half an hour, everybody had finished the viewing. The 'Round Island' trip ended with a visit to the Underwater World. Here, the group was left by themselves to do their own viewing, as well as shopping at the nearby shopping centre. Since the group had been given one hour for the visit, it was enough time for Nadia to take me to her gift shop, which was only about 10 minutes' walk from the Underwater World. She called her eldest son on her mobile phone to collect us. At the shop, she unpacked several of the new items that she bought

⁶ This Galeria is under the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and was officially opened on 3 December 1995. Tourists were charged RM 3.00 for adults and RM 1.00 for children.

during her recent visit to Kuala Lumpur. An hour later, we went back to the park to meet the group. The bust brought us back to the hotel just after 6 p.m.

From two days of tour guiding it was observed that owing to the tight schedule and the type of activities, there was only limited interaction between tourists and local people. Throughout the journey on the first day, I never came across any of them having long encounters with local people. During the trip, they might encounter other tourists, but their primary interaction tended to remain within the familiar circle of co-workers and friends. The conversation was mostly focused on which historical places should be visited and which omitted, the 'shopping time' and which souvenirs should be bought for relatives and friend at home.

Shopping had become an essential item on the agenda, particularly for domestic tourists, for whom there had to be sufficient time allocated for this activity in their itinerary. In some cases, several visits to sites had to be cancelled just to give the tourists more time to do their 'shopping' (English word used). 'Shopping' did not mean buying branded items, but souvenirs for friends and family.' It might include only a few items that they would bring back for those who had not come along. Tourists normally preferred to buy souvenirs from small shops and street vendors in the town centre rather than in shopping centres. Most of the items sold at these small shops were similar and most were imported from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. The quality was known to be not as good as that of the branded items. On Langkawi, there were not many branded items sold except in the shopping centres and duty-free shops and there was usually not as much choice as in the big cities.

In this case, branded items were *not* what the tourists were really looking for. The important thing was not where the items were made but where they were bought.

One would say, “I bought this in Langkawi,” though it was made in Indonesia, or they would refer to a T-shirt displaying the words ‘Langkawi Island’ as a ‘Langkawi T-shirt,’ although the label clearly said that it was made in Penang.⁷ Among the popular souvenirs were *batik* sarong,⁸ Langkawi T-shirts, domestic electrical appliances, casual wear, chocolate and traditional medicine such as sea-slug oil (*minyak gamat*).⁹ I realised the importance of “shopping time” only during the numerous trips when I witnessed how tourists demanded more time for shopping by persuading their tourist guide to cancel several other activities, including visits to historical sites that they had seen before.

I heard several tourists arguing with their tour guide, “That [going to the Mahsuri Mausoleum] is not important; buying souvenirs is more important. I have a list of things to buy and I don’t think I have much time to buy them all.” I remember that one of my friends, who came from Kuala Lumpur for a three-day seminar at one of the local resorts, had to absent herself from one of the lectures just to go to town to ‘go shopping.’

Unlike domestic tourists, who concentrated on small shops in Kuah town, foreign tourists generally preferred to buy souvenirs in shopping centres or handicraft shops selling original items, which were too expensive for domestic tourists. Among the popular items bought by foreign tourists were original *batik*, electrical goods such as cassette players, cameras and video cameras, perfume and liquor. These items were cheaper for foreign tourists not only because of the Island’s duty-free status but also because of the exchange rate.

On most trips the domestic tourists were quite flexible about the historical places to be visited. Since the majority of tourists spent only two or three days on the island,

⁷ A state in the northwest of Peninsular Malaysia.

⁸ *Batik* is the most popular souvenir bought by domestic tourists (83.5 per cent).

⁹ Sea-slug oil (*minyak gamat*) is a local product.

they had a limited time to visit all the places on the 'Round Island' trip. Therefore, the visits were reduced to a few selected historical places only. However, their selection often created arguments among the group. At one point during the trip, the group divided into two, when the younger tourists wanted to go to the next destination, but the older tourists wanted to do shopping. Hasiah, 40, the oldest in the group, demanded when she could do her shopping. She suggested to Lily, the representative, to drop her and two friends in the town while the rest could continue with their agenda. She told Lily when she would meet them later. Hasiah already had in mind the things that she wanted to buy. Her friends told her that a new set of crockery – Vision, Corelle, Corningware, and Melamine – had become the favourite for the family tourist. The first thing they did was to compare the prices at different shops before deciding which items to buy. Hasiah did not seem to be interested in the quality of the items. She bought a *batik* sarong for her mother and a *pelikat* sarong for her father. She decided to buy a T-shirt adorned with a picture of a big eagle and the word 'Langkawi' for her brother. Having visited ten shops, Hasiah looked exhausted with carrying her shopping bags. She was worried that she still did not know what to buy for her friends and there was little time left for last minute shopping. Hasiah had to make a quick decision before the bus arrived to take them back to the hotel. She then decided to buy a dozen bottles of sea-slug oil, known locally as *minyak gamat*,¹⁰ as souvenirs for her friends. The above description shows how tourist activities had become very structured, which explains the lack of interaction with local people. Such contact can be described as very brief and superficial in many cases where it consisted of a silent dialogue, smiling and gestures. Interaction would occur only if both the villagers and the tourists showed interest in having a conversation. The lack of contact was in fact expressed by one of the tourists,

¹⁰ *Gamat* is said to be a type of fish, which is about 20cm long and is effective in stopping bleeding. It is popular for the treatment of many illnesses such as diabetes, internal and external injuries. The dried *gamat* costs nearly RM 40 per kilogram. The villagers use wet *gamat* to make a special vegetable salad, which is known locally as *kerabu*.

whom I heard telling his friend in surprise, “We’ve been here for two days but we haven’t really talked to Langkawi people.” The only comment that the group made about the islanders was how rich (*kaya*) they had become as a result of tourism, and they would comment on the number of brand-new cars owned by local people.

The greatest interaction between the tourists and local people was with the shopkeepers during the shopping time, and even this was limited to bargaining and buying. When I asked one of the tourists about this, he replied,

We don’t have much time to talk, we’re busy buying things. The important thing is to buy what we want. I don’t want to be late and I don’t want to sing in front of the group for being late.

Although I could not go on the trip with the foreign tourists, Nadia told me that the programme was almost the same as the one that I had joined.

Language Barrier

The lack of interaction between tourists and villagers was also limited owing to the lack of language skills on the part of the local villagers. One day I was walking along the beach with my youngest foster sister who would say “hello” to every foreign tourist who walked past her, and she seemed to be excited when the tourist replied. She told me that it would be interesting if she could speak English and talk with foreign tourists. Since she knew that I could speak English, she kept persuading me to talk to a tourist who was reading a book in front of her chalet. Just to please my foster sister, I said “hello” to the female tourist, who was her mid-forties, and began to introduce myself to her.

While I was talking to the tourist, who was called Sarah and who came originally from Australia, both my foster sister and her daughter watched us with interest, though they could not understand a word of what we were saying. Sarah then invited my foster sister into her chalet and offered her sweets that she had brought from Australia. She expressed her excitement of being able to talk to “local people” (as she called us) although she had arrived on the island three days earlier. She told me that she had spent the whole three days reading books and walking on the beach and around her chalet. Therefore, it would be impossible for her to have much conversation with local people. She told me that she never tried to speak to local people because she never expected that they could speak English.

The lack of interaction between tourists and local people was caused by the lack of English not only on the part of the villagers but also of some of the tourists. I often received comments from my informants about the difficulty of interacting with some of their guests who could not speak a word of English. One day Farid, a local tourist guide, asked me to join him to collect a German couple who had just arrived at the airport. On the way to their hotel, Farid began to explain in English to the German couple, who sat behind, about the interesting places that they could visit. Each time Farid finished his explanation, the wife would speak in German to her husband, trying to translate what Farid had just said. Only then did Farid realise that the couple could not speak fluent English. He said,

These people can't really speak English. Sometimes being a tourist guide can be very boring if they [the tourists] can't talk. But then some tourists can't stop asking questions, which sometimes you can't even answer.

Sarah and Farid's experiences described the general situation regarding verbal interaction between villagers and tourists. The lack of interaction could also imply that there was less information exchanged between both parties.

Having said all that, I cannot deny that it was the contact with tourists that helped a group of local people, particularly those in direct contact with tourists, to converse in simple English. Owing to their nature of work in dealing with tourists, they were forced to speak English. One local chalet operator in his mid-40s admitted to me that he had never spoken a word of English before, but being a chalet manager had required him to speak with foreign tourists. After three years in the business and being corrected by his guests, he proudly told me that now he could give directions to tourists and advise them about places to visit. He was hoping that he could write in English so that he could reply to postcards sent by his former chalet guests.

One hotel manager, Rosli, told me that his staff became good at speaking English after being forced to learn one sentence of simple English and practise it with the hotel guests. He told me about one local young woman who worked as a waitress but was afraid to speak with tourists because she knew no English. After being forced to learn one sentence every day, she gradually gained confidence and managed to have a longer conversation with the guests. The pressure on his staff to speak English was to avoid their being regarded as inferior by tourists. As Rosli told me, "Don't let the tourists see us as stupid. That's why we must know how to speak English." He was proud when one tourist, who had just been to Thailand, told him, "Some of the local people speak better than the Thais."

I have argued that language was one of the factors that discouraged interaction between tourists and villagers. However, it was also revealed that the lack of interaction was also owing to the fear of offending the villagers. For example, Sarah wanted to ask local people whether or not they were Muslim when she saw many of the women wearing headscarves. She told me that she had spent several years with a Muslim community on one of the islands in Indonesia. However, she did not have a chance to ask because she was not too sure whether her question would offend the villagers. I was told by several other foreign tourists that I met that they were worried that the kind of question that they might ask or their vocabulary or their manners would offend the villagers. To avoid any misunderstanding, they preferred to go to the person whose job was to serve them such as the hotel manager, the tourist guide or someone with whom they had made contact earlier, such as a beach boy. Tucker (1997) describes how tourists in a village in central Turkey could enjoy interaction if they behaved in a 'respectful manner'. The villagers, who were Muslim, were quite sensitive about respect and would not interact with tourists if they perceived them to be in any way disrespectful.

The lack of knowledge about local manners could sometimes cause embarrassment not only to the tourists but also to the villagers. Said, a hotel manager, recalled the amusing moment that he experienced with his hotel guests, a young couple from America, who were interested to see the 'real life' of the villagers. They kept asking Said to take them to his village so that they could see how the villagers lived. To satisfy his guests' curiosity, Said decided to take them to see his parents-in-law, who lived in a village not far from his workplace. When they arrived at the house, his father-in-law, who was the imam (prayer leader) in the village, and his wife greeted them. Without hesitation, the American's wife, who was trying to be polite, hugged the imam. Her spontaneous reaction left Said's parents-in-law speechless. Feeling sorry for not telling them earlier about the appropriate Malay greeting, Said quickly stopped his

American friend from hugging his mother-in-law. Said, who could not help laughing told the couple that that was not the way to greet Malays, which left the couple feeling very embarrassed. Although his parents-in-law found it amusing, because he said, "They don't know our culture", the incident became a big joke for quite a while in the family. Although the couple also saw the funny side, they told Said that they would never even talk to local people without asking the correct way to greet them. This experience would explain why tourists might prefer to direct their questions about local people or local culture to people such as beach boys and tourist guides.

I have described above the limited interaction of tourists with villagers, which was due to the structured tourist activities and the language barrier. The fear of being offensive to the villagers was also one of the reasons why tourist guides and beach boys became the main source of information about local people. The nature of the work of the tourist guides and beach boys, as providers of information, explains the closer relationship that they had with tourists.

Beach Boys: Their Functions and Activities

'Beach boys' is a term used by local villagers to refer to a group of men who worked as 'salesmen' of various services. In Langkawi, most local tourist agencies, hotels and chalets offered tourist activities such as 'Island Hopping', 'Round Island' trips and sports such as scuba diving, snorkeling, jet skiing, etc. Since there were too many service providers, the tourist operators had to hire the 'beach boys' to promote their services. In Kg. Senang, there were about thirty people working as 'beach boys' who were generally aged between mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Almost half of them were local people while the rest were either from the mainland or from neighbouring countries

such as Thailand and Indonesia. These outsiders had mostly been working as beach boys at other tourist areas outside Langkawi but came to Langkawi to gain new experience.

Beach boys have various roles ranging from being salesmen, tourist guides to sometimes being in charge of tourist boats. The main difference between 'beach boys' and tourist guides is that tourist guides received formal training and are registered with the Tourist Development Corporation (TDC). To become a tourist guide, one had to pass certain examinations and be fluent in one or more than one language, such as Malay, English, Cantonese, French, Japanese, Thai and Korean. As registered tourist guides, they had to wear long sleeves, a tie and badge, though this was not always observed.

However, 'beach boys' almost always worked in ways which contrasted to tourist guides. 'Beach boys' unofficially worked with chalet owners. In other words, they were not tied to one chalet owner only. Usually, chalet managers would offer them work according to a verbal agreement. The business partnership was based on a commission. Said, a man in his late twenties, was considered a senior beach boy, having had more than four years' experience. He unofficially worked with one chalet manager by promoting the services provided by the chalet. He would receive 30 per cent commission for every customer that he collected. For example, for the 'Island Hopping,' tour which cost RM 30 per person, he would receive RM 9 per person. Sometimes if he managed to collect eight people, that was enough to fill one boat for which he would receive RM 72 per trip.

Several 'beach boys' that I met told me that they became involved as 'beach boys' after being asked by their friends to help them to bring tourists for an 'Island Hopping' trip to the nearest island. Most of them only have an adequate command of English, in fact some of them had started with broken English before gradually grasping basic

English through interaction with tourists. However, a few, especially senior 'beach boys' have very fluent English because of their long involvement in the business. Although most of them do not have proper formal training and qualifications, some of them took their own initiative to improve their guiding skills. One of them named Yan told me that he paid the cost necessary for a training course in order to get himself a diving licence.

The main task of beach boys is to get as many customers as possible to buy their services. Their arena of operation was the beach area. Their target customers were tourists, particularly foreigners, who normally spent their time lying on the beach, sunbathing or reading or in restaurants and cafes. Beach boys would frequent any places as long as there were tourists but their main targets were tourists on the beach. This kind of strategy of finding 'potential customers' was mostly based on luck, which Crick (1994:164) refers to as a 'hit and miss' game. They would go from one tourist to another to have a chat before trying to explain their services and then would begin to persuade them to take their services. 'Hello' was the common conversational opening used to greet foreign tourists, while asking where one came from (*datang dari mana*) was the common question to start a conversation with domestic tourists. In Kandy, Sri Lanka, these people are normally referred to as touts, people who pester, or try to escort and offer advice to tourists, they are trained by no-one and are regulated by no rules (Crick 1994: 159). I witnessed one female foreign tourist, who was lying on the beach, being surrounded by two beach boys who were trying to persuade her to take their package tour. They are quite persistent and forceful to the extent that it irritated the tourists.

Another difference in character between 'beach boys' and tourist guides is that 'beach boys' are more informal in terms of their approach and appearance. They did not adhere to any formal dress code. Most of the time, beach boys were seen to be wearing sleeveless shirts or were shirtless. They were usually only wearing short pants which

local villagers called *seluar bermuda* (Bermuda shorts) and generally walked around barefoot. They told me that the nature of their job and the area of operation, which was around the beach required them to wear the simplest dress. They argued that their work, which involved spending considerable time on the beach and sometimes jet-skiing while looking for potential customers made Bermuda shorts the most practical outfit for them to wear. Due to the constant exposure to sun and salt water, 'beach boys' normally had darker skin and some of them had long hair. These kind of appearances were often regarded by the villagers as 'dirty' or 'disorganised' (*tak terurus*).

In the evening, they would gather at a small café, near the beach, which has become the meeting place for these beach boys. They often invited their potential customers to have a drink at the café. Reggae songs became the trademark of this café with Bob Marley's songs played there day after day. They were often seen playing volleyball and were sometimes joined by passing tourists and sometimes were quite flirtatious with female tourists. It is not surprising that due to the nature of their work and appearance, they became the subject of scrutiny by local villagers. They were often associated with 'immoral' activities such as drinking alcohol when small late night parties were held on the beach. Though not all of the beach boys were involved in these activities there was a group of them who were mostly outsiders and who did engage in these activities.

Although these beach boys might be seen as marginal to the local tourist industry, they in fact have played an important role in the local industry. Since chalet owners did not have time or even skill to find customers, the beach boys' skill was needed to find customers for them while the owners would provide the boat and the petrol. The main asset of 'beach boys' was their friendly character. They were very approachable, they did not feel shy to interact with tourists even though they knew that

they had only a reasonable command of English. They have knowledge of the local culture and history though they were without formal training. Tourists were attracted to beach boys because they could become good companions. They could act as tour guides and make an informal trip such as a trip to their own house, introducing their guest to their circle of friends and showing them places such as isolated islands that were not included in the normal itinerary.

The relationships with tourists were sometimes very close involving physical contact. This close relationship might be due to the amount of time that tourists spent with the beach boys during certain trips. I was on the 'Island Hopping' trip when I saw a young beach boy in his early twenties joking and laughing with about six female Japanese tourists. At one point, the beach boy grabbed one of the girls and threw her into the lake. I was not sure whether there was any sexual relationship involved but I did hear one tourist guide talking to his friend about a tourist who was actually offering sex to him just for fun. Since local villagers were not very open minded on sexual matters, I did not get much information on whether there was any sexual encounter involved between tourists and local men. However, one tourist guide told me that some might get sexual services in the big hotels but the supply was usually from outside Langkawi. I never heard stories about local women getting involved in sexual activity though I heard of a few cases where local men went to Southern Thailand to get sex. Even though cases are hard to prove, it is an 'open secret' that many local men, even in the past, did go to the Thai border to obtain sexual services. One local man told me that "since many Langkawi men have now become richer, they can go to the border quite often...and obtain a cheaper service". Although chalet owners claimed that they did not allow any sexual activities on their premises, that did not mean that the activity did not exist at all in Langkawi.

Although these beach boys were often seen as very friendly towards their guests, these same beach boys actually complained about their tourist guests' behaviours and would discuss it among themselves. Some complained that their guests were very fussy and that they often expected too much. Despite these differences in behavior, they claimed that they have to act friendly in front of their guests and portray an 'entertaining' image because this would help them to get more 'customers' and tips from their guests.

Many of these beach boys might not have a formal tourist guide licence but they were not considered to be operating illegally by the local authorities. This is because the local authorities realized that their activities could generate considerable employment and income for local people. The reason many local people wanted to become beach boys was that they did not have to go through any complex training procedure. In fact, anybody could become a beach boy as long as they made an effort and displayed some degree of skill in communicating with people. Skills such as fishing boat operating or knowledge of local history and culture were seen as assets, which could be manipulated and improved, by on-the-job-training.

It is important when looking at these beach boys to recognize that they are by no means all working closely together. Although they worked in the same area, they actually did not have many interactions with each other. Some local beach boys had different perceptions towards beach boys from outside Langkawi. Several local beach boys, when I asked, did not even know who those from outside Langkawi were and just told me, "they're outsiders. We never talk to them". A similar response came when I posed the same question to those beach boys from outside Langkawi. Many of them said to me, "we just do our own work, find our own customers. We don't disturb them". It was observed that local beach boys who stayed not far from their workplace would

usually go home immediately after work while beach boys from outside Langkawi would usually spend their leisure time at the reggae café until late at night. The fact is that many of them were still single and therefore they had plenty of time to socialize with their friends. Some of the beach boys from outside Langkawi maintained that they were not all involved in immoral activities though they never denied that some among them were (*dah rosak*), 'already bad'.

Although many of the beach boys worked with several local chalet operators, I also heard complaints from chalet owners about beach boys who worked with other chalet operators. These complaints were generally related to their physical appearance and their 'pestering' behavior. One chalet owner who has one local beach boy working for him claimed that beach boys from outside Langkawi have portrayed themselves as disorganized and dirty and that this image might be misunderstood by tourists or outsiders as being representative of the general image of Langkawi beach boys.

It is clear that the relationships between local beach boys, beach boys from outside Langkawi and chalet operators are not always close. However, the most important thing is that their relationships are decidedly asymmetrical. While chalet operators have the economic resources and facilities, such as touring boats, they possess insufficient time and have little skill in interacting with people. By contrast, most beach boys may lack the economic assets but they possess a considerable knowledge of the local history and culture, and are well informed on the best places to visit or stay etc. Chalet operators therefore need the expertise of the beach boys to promote their services. Hence, it can be argued here that tourist operators and beach boys are always dependent on each other to help develop the local tourist industry.

Local Perceptions of Tourists

In this section, I suggest that in trying to understand the tourists' aims, local people became more tolerant of their behaviour. In the case of Langkawi, I argue that the fact that the villagers of Kg Senang understood that the tourists' main objective was not to stare at them but to see and experience the natural beauty of the island shaped a flexible attitude towards certain tourists' behaviour. This flexible attitude also explains the lack of open resentment by the villagers towards tourists. I discuss later the kind of tourist behaviour that the villagers came to tolerate.

I was often struck by the way in which the villagers viewed tourists. I was surprised that almost everyone was positive towards tourists and hardly anybody reacted negatively, although they might have complaints about certain incidents. When asked, the villagers told me that tourists came to Langkawi not to look at them but to experience the beauty of the island. The villagers took pride in their beautiful island that had become a tourist attraction, and expressed how pleased they were at being able to share it with the tourists. However, I should mention here that this perception mainly referred to foreign tourists.

The villagers described foreign tourists as people who liked spending most of their time in relaxing, reading books, sleeping and sun-bathing. Therefore, the villagers maintained, these tourists preferred to be left alone to follow their own inclinations. These stereotypical ideas were summed up by one of the villagers:

Many tourists come to Langkawi to relax and they go to a quiet place to read or swim. They work so hard in the big cities. Now what they want is peace of mind. They like sunbathing because they want to have a skin colour like

ours. They don't get much sun in their country. That's why they don't want to be disturbed.

The local villagers found foreign tourists to be very appreciative of certain scenery or objects, which might not exist in their home country. Indeed, Urry (1990) argues that tourism is all about gazing upon particular scenes that are different from those encountered in everyday life. One local woman explained to me that foreign tourists liked spending their time walking around their chalets or around the village, watching and taking photographs of the buffaloes at the paddy field, or other animals such as chickens, who were often seen wandering around the chalet area. The tourists' deep interest in and appreciation of these objects or scenery which were so familiar to the villagers caused these tourists to be labelled *jakun*. *Jakun* is a term used by the villagers to describe the reaction of those who have never had any experience of certain objects or situations. A typical example was highlighted by my neighbour's daughter. One day we were driving along the coast when she noticed a young foreign tourist who had stopped at the roadside to watch a chicken with great interest. She said to me, "Look, he must've never seen a real chicken before."

The domestic tourists normally spent the time with their friends or family on the beach or touring the island. As one of the villagers told me, the domestic tourists liked shopping and touring the island: "They are busy with their own activities and don't bother us." The fact that the tourists had their own activities and did not "bother" the villagers showed that their presence was not regarded as intrusive in the daily life of the village.

Apart from the fact that the villagers did not feel that they had become the subjects of a 'tourist gaze', their flexible attitude was also due to their perception of tourists as an asset to the local economy. The villagers, particularly local entrepreneurs,

regardless of the size of their businesses, relied heavily on tourists as a source of income. They argued that tourists were the ones who used their services, stayed in their chalets and ate in their restaurants. The close link between tourists and money was expressed by one local man, who operated boat trips to the nearest islands: "No tourists, no money. The more tourists who come, the more money we can make." Instead of being viewed as individuals, tourists were assessed as providers of profit to local businesses. It was observed that the villagers appeared to be more tolerant for the sake of potential economic gain. Realising the importance of this fact, the villagers maintained that the tourists should be well looked after and their wishes satisfied as fully as possible. The villagers argued that satisfying tourists was to give them the 'freedom' (*kebebasan*) to fulfil their curiosity and 'do what they want to do.'

One local taxi driver said to me: "We always have to smile when greeting them though sometimes we're just too tired to do that." The villagers argued that tolerance towards tourists should be maintained to the extent that they had to bear with the attitudes of some of them. One beach boy told me that a few of the foreign tourists were sometimes said to be arrogant, whereas others said how they liked English tourists for using 'polite words' when asking for something. However, the beach boy then told me, "These tourists need extra attention and we have to explain fully about certain services." German tourists were often viewed as quite "rough with words" and could easily get annoyed when the service was not up to the expected standard. One hotel supervisor told me that he had to be patient in dealing with these kinds of tourists because he did not want to discourage them from coming to Langkawi. The tourist operators found the American tourists very talkative and sometimes they were too tired to answer their questions. However, they asserted that sometimes Japanese tourists could be quite boring when they did not talk much and always agreed to the activities suggested to them.

Another example of the flexible attitude of the villagers was Cik Yah's reaction towards a foreign tourist who wanted to photograph her in front of her house. We were chatting at the small *pangkin* (veranda) outside Cik Yah's house when I noticed a young foreign tourist, with a camera draped around his neck, walking towards her house and looking for a good position to photograph it. I told her that the tourist seemed to be interested in photographing her and her house. Cik Yah, who did not seem to be embarrassed, told me, "That's okay." She in fact asked me to get ready to smile for the camera. Wondering about her reaction, I asked her how she felt about the tourist's behaviour. She told me, "Let him [do it]; he wants to take a photo of this 'traditional house'. He wants to show it to his friends back home...what's wrong with that? It's not often, only once in a while." Cik Yah's response shows that she was only trying to fulfil the tourist's curiosity and did not view his action as intrusive in her life. She was in fact proud that her old house could attract tourists who were seeking the 'authenticity' that they could not find in their 'modern' life. However, the fact that tourists did not frequently wander around the village with the specific purpose of collecting photographs explained her co-operation (cf. Tucker 1997).¹¹

Although the villagers were normally quite shy and preferred not to be in the photographs because they often said that they were "not well-dressed", they did not seem reluctant to being photographed. Usually the tourists were taking photograph from a distance, for example from the main road and therefore there was seldom any interaction between them (cf. Tucker 1997: 119). The villagers' tolerance of tourists was also apparent when the expression 'open minded' (*fikiran terbuka*) was reiterated to show their acceptance of certain tourist behaviour. This meant that they had to

¹¹ Tucker (1997) described how photography caused distress in a Turkish village, because of the negative meaning attached to images in Islam. Numerous disputes also arise when tourists take pictures of people without asking them first.

understand that although certain behaviour was viewed as ill mannered by some, to others it was just “cultural differences.” Hugging in public, for example, might cause embarrassment to the villagers, but I was struck by the tolerance of the villagers, which showed their understanding of the cultural differences.

Nowadays, the villagers told me, had become ‘used’ to tourists who wore bikinis or swimsuits. It had “become normal here” (*dah biasa*) and it was “not a strange thing any more” (*tak pelik lagi*). They argued that they should be quite flexible with tourists who dressed in that way because some of them did not know the local moral code and how to behave accordingly. In fact, one local man told me that some foreign tourists were ‘better mannered’ when they wore sarongs to cover the lower body after swimming. It has been generally assumed that tourists have always been the observers and host communities the objects of observation. However, in Langkawi, I noticed on several occasions that the observation was not all one-sided. Tourists had also become the objects of curiosity for the villagers. Although the wearing of swimsuits or bikinis was viewed by the villagers as “becoming normal” (*dah biasa*), it was still the subject of comments, satire and jokes. In the afternoon, several groups of local women and men could be seen sitting and chatting near the beach, and observing the tourists who were walking past.

They would exchange amused comments on the tourists’ clothing and anatomy. Several tourists realised that they were the objects of observation although they did not realise that they were also the objects of amusement. During this observation, the difference in norms and values between villagers and tourists was discussed. One of the women, the oldest in the group, commented that one tourist “had no shame” (*tak ada malu*) in revealing her body. However, a young woman in the group, commented in reply to the older woman’s remark: “We have often said that they don’t have shame (*tak*

ada malu) for revealing their bodies, but they might be saying that we're crazy in going for a swim fully clothed." Malay tourists were usually seen in their casual dress – long trousers, T-shirt and headscarves although sometimes there were also domestic tourists who wore swimsuits. Young Malay tourists preferred to wear long or just below the knee black leggings and baggy T-shirts.

The discussion confirms that the villagers showed a degree of understanding of cultural differences. One chalet operator in his fifties told me, "We have to understand the different culture and cannot stop them from doing it. We can't be too strict because that will scare away the tourists." Even then, he argued, as the 'host', they could not change the tourists' behaviour just because the tourists were in their village. The young tourist operator argued that instead of "trying to change them, we should generally be open to change to give local tourism a chance to develop."

In this case, the villagers were becoming what Picard (1993) called 'touristified' as a result of tourism production, which meant that tourism had become an integral part of the local culture. This was a continuing process of cultural invention (Tucker 1997). However, I maintain here that although the villagers were quite generally open to change, they did not necessarily accept every change or accept tourist behaviour as part of their culture. There was a limit to their tolerance. As Tucker pointed out, the process was not always smooth running, for it was often affected by conflicting interests.

I have shown that the understanding of tourists' aims had a strong influence on the attitude of the villagers towards tourists. The perception of tourists as an asset to the local industry and therefore the requirement to make an effort in satisfying their wishes and curiosity, had shaped the 'flexible' attitude towards certain tourist behaviour.

Flexibility: The Limitations

I have argued that the fulfilment of tourists' desires created a flexible attitude towards certain tourist behaviour. However, I also suggest here that such flexibility had its limitations. Though the villagers seemed to accept bikinis and swimsuits, they maintained that women going topless or nudism on the beach was definitely unacceptable. I was told of several incidents of this kind that took place a few years ago. At one time, local children would go to the beach after school just to see topless tourists sunbathing. Abu, a chalet operator, had encountered several of his chalet guests sunbathing topless and had to advise them politely that such behaviour offended the local community. Abu was glad that none of his guests objected to this, and in fact expressed their ignorance of the local values. Abu told me that such incidents no longer occurred nowadays and that not many tourists went topless on the beach.

The above discussion shows the awareness of the villagers that there was always a boundary between being flexible and "open minded". Being flexible did not mean that every kind of tourist behaviour was acceptable. Black (1996) also described a similar situation in the village of Mellieha in Malta, where the villagers neither simply absorbed the behaviour of their guests, nor did they take to 'mirroring' what was expected of them. They felt well equipped to negotiate their relationship with foreigners and to exercise some choice and control in where the line of tolerance was to be drawn.

Depa Buat Kerja Depa; Kita Buat Kerja Kita (They Do Their Own Thing, We Do Our Own Thing)

I have discussed above how the villagers became quite flexible towards tourists. However, such flexibility did not come without a price. The villagers also expected the

tourists to reciprocate by not disturbing their privacy. This was a kind of 'mutual need' that was never actually articulated but seemed to be understood by both parties. It created an attitude, which I called 'mind-your-own-business' among the villagers. It had no negative connotations; rather it was a kind of 'silent agreement' between tourists and villagers, which more or less said: "I'm not bothering you, so don't bother me." The tourists, who were simply looking for 'fun and relaxation', leaving the villagers to live their own daily lives, had developed this unwritten agreement: "You do your own thing, we do our own thing" (*depa buat kerja depa, kita buat kerja kita*).

In many cases that I have encountered, the villagers maintained that the tourists themselves wanted privacy. An example of its importance was shown by one of Bakar's guests, an American tourist, who told Bakar to remove the TV from his chalet. He did not want newspapers to be sent to the chalet or the housekeeper to clean it. He told Bakar that he wanted to "detach himself from the outside world" for a week. This experience made Bakar realise the lengths to which an individual would go to achieve privacy. The lack of resentment towards tourists was explained by the fact that the villagers felt that they could follow their own leisure pursuits without being affected by the arrival of tourists. The villagers could have their own privacy and also share some of the new tourist facilities, such as the supermarkets, cinemas and fast-food restaurants. They could go out for dinner at a local restaurant owned by a hotel, which offered a cheaper rate, thus enjoying a family treat after receiving their wages at the end of the month. In the evening, local people were seen taking their families for a walk in the park or on the beach.

It is possible to argue here that people on Langkawi were not simply *the* 'host' to tourists for they themselves also became tourists when they were spectators at the international events that were held on Langkawi. The Langkawi International Maritime

Airshow (LIMA) attracted the villagers to watch and experience the event like any other tourists. My foster cousin, Leha, was really enthusiastic about attending such events. Every time one was held, she never failed to inform me and ask me whether I would like to go with her. Leha usually went with her colleagues on their motorcycles after work. She also persuaded her neighbours to come along. Her enthusiasm in attending most of the events led to her mother often teasing her that she was “behaving more like tourists.”

Besides attendance at the events organised by local tourist agencies, the villagers had also developed their own leisure activities such as picnics or barbecues with family and friends on the beach or going fishing. Many of the villagers still had their fishing boats though they no longer went to sea. During their leisure time in the evening, the villagers would go out fishing (*memancing*) with their friends. Since fishing normally entailed spending a few nights at sea, friends rather than family members were invited. The villagers often said proudly that it did not cost them much, for they had their own boats and fishing gear, whereas tourists have to pay a high price for the same activity. It was revealed that a local tourist agency (Holidays Recreation Services Sdn. Bhd) charged between RM 240 and RM 450 per boat for 4 - 6 hours. Such a high charge discouraged all but those tourists who were really keen on fishing. By having their own boats, the villagers also could go or bring their relatives from outside Langkawi to ‘Island Hopping’. Unlike the tourists, the trip was free apart from the cost of the fuel.¹²

For their picnics, the villagers usually chose a place that was somewhat isolated and away from the tourist area. During my fieldwork, I was invited by my informants to go for a ‘picnic’ (English word used) with them either on the beach or at the nearest waterfall. For the picnic, they brought food such as sandwiches, local cakes, fruits and

¹² I have mentioned earlier that the charge to tourists for ‘island hopping’ was RM 30 – 40 per person.

drinks. When asked about the choice of picnic sites, they often maintained that they liked to have their own privacy so that they could swim without feeling embarrassed by outsiders staring at them. Although the villagers in Kg Senang often denied their preference in avoiding tourists, their action was in a way to try to avoid being labelled 'tourists'. Therefore, having their own space and not wanting to be seen using the same area as the tourists was one way to emphasise their 'local' status.

For the barbecue, the men who hosted the gathering, especially the father and son, would go *menjala* (shore fishing) two or three hours before it began. In Kg Senang, *menjala* had become a leisure activity for the villagers, especially for those who had their own fishing boats. Since *menjala* was normally done not far from the coast, it would take only about two or three hours. Whilst waiting for their menfolk to return, the women would prepare side dishes and set up the barbecue. During the barbecue, they would joke, gossip and discuss local business. Before sunset, they would begin to pack everything and return home.

It could be argued here that access to the same activities as the tourists, but without the expense, and at the same time having the opportunity to enjoy their own activities might explain why the villagers did not find the presence of tourists intrusive in their daily lives. They could still organise the *wau* competition,¹³ an event that was held not for tourists but for local people. Although it was not advertised in the calendar of tourist events, there was no restriction on tourists to attend. The *wau* competition was an annual event in which people from different villages took part. It was held in a huge field, which was quite far from the village where I was staying and seemed to be far from the tourist area. However, one local man told me that the chosen area should not be

¹³ A *Wau* is similar to a kite but normally double in size with various patterns and designs. The *Wau* competition is based on the art of the design and patterns and the ability to manoeuvre the *wau*.

interpreted as the villagers trying to avoid the gaze of tourists but because of its suitability for the competition. During the competition, I noticed that fewer than ten tourists happened to pass by the village, and only a few of them stopped, just long enough to take some photographs.

The fact that the villagers could not only share the tourist facilities but also live their own lives would explain the lack of hostility towards tourists. It would also explain the villagers' flexible attitude towards foreign tourists in particular. However, they seemed to be quite critical of domestic tourists particularly the Malays. I refer specifically to Malay tourists because they shared a similar culture and were therefore expected to adhere to local values more than the foreigners. The villagers had a distant attitude towards domestic tourists from other ethnic groups such as the Chinese and Indians because they never had much close contact with them in their everyday lives.

The fact that the Malay tourists were apparently more affluent than local people also helped to create a critical attitude among the latter towards them. Domestic tourists were perceived to be relatively 'rich' because, the villagers argued, it was not cheap to come to Langkawi. Although foreign tourists were often perceived as rich, the villagers realised that was not true of all of them. One chalet operator confirmed this fact, after having several experiences with foreign tourists, who never stopped bargaining for cheaper rates. However, he pointed out that the domestic tourists must have money, otherwise they would never come to Langkawi for a holiday in the first place. One tourist operator told me: "These people [referring specifically to Malay tourists] are 'middle class' (*kelas pertengahan*) and have stable incomes. If not, how could they afford to bring their families here for a holiday." Indeed, based on my own calculation, it would cost at least RM 300 - 400 for a single person to spend at least two nights on Langkawi and it definitely would cost more for those who brought their families.

The practice of going on holiday (*bercuti*) is a powerful sign of having 'extra money'. The time spent 'away from work' also represents a certain standard of wealth because it is often members of the urban middle and upper classes who can afford trips to diverse and distant parts of the country. In the Malay community, work is viewed as a source of income to pay for accommodation, food, clothes, the children's education and other basic necessities. Norazit (1996) has argued for the importance of work to the Malays and described their categorisation of work. Since work is important to the Malays, having the ability to absent oneself from it and spend money on 'leisure consumption' reflects one's level of income, lifestyle and social status.

The difference between work and leisure was discussed by Wallman (1972) when she defined work as "physical and psychic energy that a worker puts into providing, maintaining and converting economic resources", whereas leisure was the ability to absent oneself from this work (1972: 2). Thus, being away from work meant being away from that primary source of income. This detachment of oneself from daily life is also related to the concept of 'taste' as used by Bourdieu (1979). He pointed out that in modern society, working people's taste derived from their work experience and the pressure imposed by their needs (1979: 283). Thus, "good taste" was associated with distancing oneself from the workplace.

According to this perception, domestic tourists were rich (*kaya*) because they could absent themselves from work and had "extra money" for leisure, whereas many of the villagers considered themselves to be still struggling to meet their basic necessities. The perception became a powerful symbol of their social status when other local villagers asserted that they were middle class (*kelas pertengahan*). However, it should be noted here that this was usually a perception of the Malay tourists who travelled

independently. An organised tour normally comprised a chartered trip, which offered a cheaper rate or discount to the participants, who were usually factory workers, company employees and social club members.

The rich and middle-class status of domestic tourists provoked criticism from the villagers. Several local people asserted, "These people [Malay tourists] like to show off (*berlagak*). Some of them are quite arrogant (*sombong*) because they think that they have more money than us." Said, a hotel manager, who had had several arguments with Malay tourists over food prices, complained that a number of Malay tourists expected a high level of service, but always insisted on cheaper prices. Said, who seemed to be quite annoyed with some of the domestic tourists, said to me:

They paid the cheapest hotel rate but wanted to be served like five-star hotel guests. They complained about the service and the price, and always compared the hotel rate with the hotel where they stayed on the mainland. They were trying to show that they had a lot of money by asserting that they had stayed at a number of different hotels on the mainland.

When asked how they could recognise domestic tourists, one local villager said, "Oh...you can tell by the way they speak - very loud - and their dress especially the young people. But not all are like that." Although local people spoke the same language, their interaction was often limited to the question of where one came from. The old domestic tourists were thought to be more friendly than the young ones.

The critical attitude of the villagers towards Malay tourists was manifested, for example, in their comments on the latter's style of dress, particularly that of the young female tourists. I have mentioned earlier how the villagers had become used to foreign tourists wearing swimming costumes. However, when Malay tourists wore them, that

often invited more attention from local youths. They would start making comments and criticising them for not having any shame (*tak ada malu*). The Malay tourists, especially the young women, who wore 'something different or something sexy,' would often become the subject of scrutiny by the villagers and the beach boys who would enjoy teasing them. One day I was talking to two beach boys and a group of beach boys were playing volleyball when five Malay girls walked past us on the beach. They seemed to be in their early twenties and wore tight, sleeveless white tops, with Langkawi *batik* sarongs wrapped around the waist. Since their dress was quite different (one of the beach boy described it as sexy) from normal Malay tourists, they attracted attention from the boys. One of the beach boys began to shout at them, inviting them to join in the game of volleyball. The girls just smiled at them in reply. The beach boy then said to me, "They must be *minah* KL. I can tell from their dress. *Orang sini* (people here) would not dare to wear that style."

This example shows how the villagers were more critical of Malay tourists than of foreign tourists. It is possible to argue here that domestic tourists had a greater effect than foreign tourists on local people. This evidence may be contradicted by the general assumption that foreign or non-Muslim tourists were often accused of having a strong influence on local people in the host country. Therefore, difference in religion was not an anti-tourist issue on Langkawi. However, I maintain that there was serious concern expressed within the community regarding the example set by domestic tourists and also outsiders (*orang luar*), such as those young workers from outside Langkawi, who were thought to be encouraging unacceptable behaviour among local people.

The Attitude of 'Permanent' Outsiders

I have mentioned that Langkawi people have divided those people from outside Langkawi or outsiders into two categories: outsiders who stay in Langkawi permanently or those who stay only temporarily. These outsiders come from the mainland or are nationals of neighbouring countries such as Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. They were mainly working in the hotel industry, in tourist agencies or within other tourism services. Outsiders from the mainland came to Langkawi either as government servants, private workers or businessmen who wanted to try their 'luck' (*nasib*) in the local tourism business. Some of them would stay for a number of years depending on their working contract but many of them were not quite sure of the length of time they would remain in Langkawi, they would comment, "if I have good luck, I'll stay longer, if not, I'll go somewhere else".

Most of these foreign workers were staying in accommodation provided by their employers. For example, government servants such as police officers, doctors, and teachers who served in Langkawi generally resided in government-owned quarters, which were situated in the town area. Hotel workers from outside Langkawi mostly stayed in a hostel rented by their employer from a local villager. In the village of Kg Senang, some of these hotel workers rented houses from local villagers which were occasionally located in the same compound as the owner's house. There were also outsiders who rented rooms and stayed together with the owners. These different categories of location emphasized the differences in the degree of their interaction with or the nature of their relationship with local villagers. Outsiders and foreign workers employed on the island knew their status as outsiders and that they were not going to stay permanently in Langkawi. This fact influenced the way they presented themselves in the local community and influenced their relationships with local villagers.

Carsten has noted that the compounds "...are a collection of houses of closely related consanguines" (1997: 163). She argues that the concept of sharing is very much emphasized between houses of one compound through exchanges of cooked food and informal evening visits. However, not all of the outsiders who were renting houses in the same compound behaved like the other local residents of that compound. I argue that 'willingness' to be incorporated into the local community has become the important aspect in determining the nature of the relationships between these outsiders and local villagers. This willingness can be manifested by various patterns of behaviour. The most significant symbol of this willingness is to try to conform to local practices, to get involved in local activities and to 'mix with village people' (*bercampur dengan orang kampung*).

It was observed that many of these outsiders and foreign workers were unwilling to be incorporated into the local community. Outsiders could resist being incorporated by constantly maintaining their status as 'outsider' (*orang luar*) because this status would give them a kind of 'authority' not to feel obliged to conform to local practices even though they were staying in the same compound as other local villagers. This resistance to being incorporated can be manifested through the creation of boundaries between themselves and local villagers. This can be expressed by not attending the local *kenduri* (feast) after being invited several times, not participating in evening visits, seldom go to the mosque except during Friday prayers, avoiding long conversations, and at the very extreme, avoiding any eye contact.

There was one family who came from the mainland and rented a house, owned by my neighbour, Cik Ton. They came to stay in the village because the husband was working in a tourist agency which was not far from the village. The house was only a few yards away from my foster sister's house and Cik Ton's house. One day, Cik Ton

was having a small feast and invited the family to attend the feast but they failed to come. Another invitation was offered but they again failed to come by giving various excuses. Obviously, Cik Ton was really offended by their behaviour and made the decision not to invite them again for any future occasions. As Cik Ton told me, “why do we want to invite them, they don’t even want to mix with us”. In this case, local villagers do not seem to have the power to force these people to conform to local practices because of their status as outsiders.

Having said that, I maintain that this boundary is often very fluid and can easily be broken if the outsiders show willingness to mix with local people. A further example of this boundary and status is expressed by another Malay family who also rented a house from a local villager. A week after they moved into their new house, a woman came to my foster sister’s house to introduce herself as a new neighbour. In that visit, she brought with her a plate of fried noodles. My foster sister and she sat near the front door for a few minutes, talking about her family and reason she and her family had come to Langkawi. The fried noodles can be seen as a mark of her effort to form a close relationship with her neighbour and also as a sign of her willingness to be incorporated into the local community.

It was observed that local people were always excited about incorporating outsiders as ‘Langkawi people’ either through the process of marriage or fostering. In this case, the process of incorporation in Langkawi as argued by Carsten (1997) still continues to operate today. Several women from outside Langkawi who were working on the island have gone through this process of ‘becoming Langkawi people’ when they married local men. Most of them met their prospective husbands at their workplace and after marriage, many decided to reside permanently in Langkawi. Their willingness to be incorporated into the local community was expressed through their articulation, “I was

originally from Perlis but I have already become a Langkawi person when I married a person from here” (*saya asal dari Perlis tapi dah jadi orang Langkawi bila kahwin dengan orang sini*). I also could not get away from this process of ‘incorporation’ when I was constantly persuaded to ‘find a local man’ (*cari orang sini*) so that I could become a ‘Langkawi person’.

Conclusion

My analysis of the response of the villagers of Kg Senang to the tourists has not been a unified one. As argued by Pearce (1994), the interaction between tourists and local people was mediated by the tourists’ affluence, motivation and status in the local community. The nature of the encounter was also limited because the contact was confined to “economic exchange”, particularly with local entrepreneurs, in which social ties or personal attitudes were not expected. The ambiguity and tension in relationships between host and guest were typical in situations in which social and economic exchange were mingled (Erb 2000).

The argument illustrates how the contact required effort from both sides and was certainly not one-way (cf. Nunez 1989). Instead it shows how local people derived their own strategies for dealing with tourists by creating a space for tourists as well as maintaining their own space. Nunez, who suggested that tourism should be understood within the framework of acculturation theory, argued that acculturation would occur “when two cultures come into contact of any duration, each becomes somewhat like the other through a process of borrowing” (Nunez 1989: 266). Acculturation refers to a cultural change that occurs when two people from different cultures come into long and intimate contact (Goldsmith and Spindler 1952). Nunez argued that because many tourist destinations were the less developed countries and most of the tourists came from

the West, the tourists were thought to be less likely to borrow culturally from their hosts than their hosts were from them (1977: 208).

However, those arguments are questionable owing to the globalisation of tourism. Waters argues that in globalisation, every person is a potential tourist (Waters 1990). This means that people in the less developed countries also have the opportunity to become tourists. It would be inaccurate today to argue that tourists are mostly from the West, which represents what is called the 'major' culture. No doubt, the power difference between the cultures in contact is important, but to argue that it takes only this one form in all tourist-host contacts is to obscure a good deal of its cross-cultural variability and the importance of domestic tourism, particularly in Southeast Asia. In this region, tourists are mostly from the neighbouring ASEAN countries, which share at least some cultural elements. Of the tourists who visited Malaysia in 1989, those from the West comprised only 9 per cent, mainly from the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, whereas 62 per cent came from Singapore, 7 per cent from Thailand and small numbers from Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines (King 1993). Domestic visitors accounted for more than 8 million or over half of all hotel bed-nights. In 1997, the highest number of tourists visiting Langkawi came from Thailand and Singapore.¹⁴ By simply asserting that only foreign tourists represented the 'culture' that had a strong influence on local people undermines the variety of cultural elements represented by domestic tourists. Because Malaysia has different ethnic groups, cultural contact should not be seen as a straightforward process between only two cultures but rather comprising numerous complexities.

Even if there were cases where local people were trying to 'borrow the tourists' culture', to what extent can we say that the tourist really dresses or behaves according to

¹⁴ Malaysian Tourist Board 1998.

his/her own culture? And to what extent can we assume that the tourists fully represent their cultures? As one of the villagers told me, "The way they [the tourists] dressed is not much different from the young people here." Generally foreign tourists wore very casual dress. Since Langkawi has very warm weather, foreign tourists usually wore shorts and T-shirt, cap, sunglasses, sneakers or sandals. Therefore, the tourists' dress may not represent their actual lives in their home country.

According to Graburn's (1983) discussion of tourism as a modern ritual, tourists may try to detach themselves from their own culture back home and behave differently. As I have discussed earlier, this behaviour can be related to the concept of work, because the tourists are trying to detach themselves from their everyday lives, and it has been argued that tourism is a form of leisure activity which structures individual life as an alternative to work (Smith 1989: 2). Therefore, what they are demonstrating may not fully represent their culture. Furthermore, when living in their own culture, people have a certain image and characteristics that are constrained by the community. However, these characteristics may become less apparent when people detach themselves from the workplace. They may take up a simpler lifestyle and try to do the things that they might not do in their home country.

Furthermore, people's social status or rank may not be clearly revealed when they become tourists. This observation highlights tourism's similarity with the structure of ritual process as discussed by Turner (1969). Turner argued that in the liminal stage, ritual participants had neither status, role nor rank and therefore created an egalitarian society, which he called 'communitas' (1969: 96). The same occurs in tourism in that tourists are not normally referred to by the rank that they possess back home (Graburn 1983). Thus, what the local people are likely to borrow from the tourists may not be the culture itself. Even if the hosts 'borrow' the behaviour of the tourists, are they really

influenced by their first-hand contact with them? It would be hard to find a society, however remote, which was still isolated from the 'outside' world.

It is possible to argue here that many other factors may have a greater influence rather than the assertion that local people are affected only by looking at 'foreign tourists in swimsuits lying on the beach.' It should be acknowledged here that the contact through television and other telecommunications have a greater influence than contact with tourists. On Langkawi, almost every household had a television set showing various local and Western movies. I argue here that the villagers' impressions of foreigners came primarily from television, and they then tried to validate their perception of foreigners by contact with tourists. This point was emphasised by Pearce (1988), who argued that the encounter between tourists and their hosts only confirmed their previous attitudes toward each other, regardless of whether these attitudes were positive or negative.

Recent anthropological work dealing with the impact of tourist on local culture and social relationships acknowledges that 'culture' is continually being reinvented, that it is adaptable, that 'identity construction' is ongoing and people therefore are 'cultural strategists' (Smith 1982; Wood 1993; Linnekin 1997; Abrams and Waldren 1997). 'Culture' is not something that is clearly observed, unitary, passive and distinctive, and so can be easily pinpointed. It has been argued that culture should be treated as internally differentiated, active and changing through time in order to understand the relationship between it and tourism (Woods 1979; Hitchcock 1993; King 1993). Certain cultures can be shared and practised by two or more different ethnic groups, especially in a pluralist society such as Malaysia (Nagata 1984). I suggest that tourist's culture is not so much borrowed but that the mobility of foreigners and local people has also created the movement of cultures or 'travelling cultures', a notion inspired by Said

(1983) and Clifford (1992), in which contact is likely to result in a hybrid culture: part host and part tourist. This hybrid culture is caused by varied patterns of mobility and therefore the tourists do not possess a culture so obviously different from that of the host. Hence, the kinds of cultures that result are more fragmented, hybrid and disjointed (Rojek and Urry 1997). They will continue to be reinvented as a result of the flows of peoples, objects and images across national borders, either through work-based migration, individual travel or mass tourism (Clifford 1992; Gilroy 1993).

Chapter 5

Local Debate on Tourism, Islam and Muslim Values

This chapter will describe how the villagers of Kg Senang managed negotiation – the interplay between their Islamic values and their work or business ethics – to enable them to integrate into the local tourist industry. Some of the characteristics of tourist services, such as dealing with alcoholic drink - which contravenes Islamic values, required them to renegotiate their values and identity as *orang Islam* (Muslim people). These often-opposing goals lay at the crux of this negotiation faced by local villagers. In this discussion, I focus on their perception of hotel employment and examine why they were quite reluctant to let out their properties, such as restaurants and land, to non-Muslims for tourism. On Langkawi, it was revealed that the negotiation with tourist services was centred on the handling and consumption of two unlawful (*haram*) items: *arak* (alcoholic drinks)¹ and pork. The development of tourism on Langkawi brought these issues to the forefront in a most dramatic way. The fact that this prohibition covers not only the consumption of these items but also earnings derived from their sale complicated the negotiation. As *orang Islam*, the local villagers argued that they were forbidden not only to consume *arak* and unlawful food, in which they would be considered to be committing a sin (*dosa*) and would receive God's punishment, but also to share the same sin by collaboration (*subahat*).

Some of the villagers told me that they were quite reluctant to allow their children to work in hotels because 'the job will include the serving of *arak*.' Despite that restriction, the desire to have a regular income, which would enable them to buy modern goods, led them to devise flexible strategies of employing religious principles and

¹ *Arak* is a local term referring to all kinds of alcoholic drinks.

different interpretations. Ironically, these different interpretations were sometimes used in such a contradictory way that they were not in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In this chapter, I describe how the negotiation was encoded in traditional moral discourse. I discuss how the local perception of hotel employment gradually changed as many villagers played a more productive part in hotel services. Previously, the older generation had thought that hotel employment was 'inappropriate' (*tak elok*) because hotels were often perceived as a 'centres of vice' (*tempat maksiat*). However, the increase in the number of hotels on Langkawi, the growing knowledge of the type of work available in them and the desire to earn a regular income gradually changed this perception. This was done by claiming that the 'old generation' (*orang tua-tua dulu*) was 'less knowledgeable' (*kurang cerdik*). By using this principles and socio-religious concepts such as 'strong *iman*' (faith) or 'weak *iman*' and 'taking care of oneself', this earlier perception was gradually being reshaped.

In this discussion, I shall focus more on the local debate on hotel employment and *arak* since both had a strong influence on the adjustment of the islanders to enable them to participate in a local tourist industry. Since the selling of *arak* and unlawful food was prohibited, this made it difficult for the Malay villagers to let their land or business premises to non-Muslims, especially the local Chinese. I argue that it was during this negotiation that the diversity of interpretations and practices was clearly manifested. I describe how these different interpretations were constantly employed by a group of villagers, particularly the local entrepreneurs, to maintain their Islamic values and at the same time to play an active part in tourism. I also describe another group of villagers who employed the same religious principle to maintain their views, which contradicted those of the first group. In the final section of this chapter I examine how the different policies implemented by the local tourist agencies and the local Religious Department

put these two groups in opposition to each other. This situation indeed created difficulties for any close co-operation between these organisations. In addition, the different interpretations and practices in the local community made the implementation of certain Islamic policies problematic. In order to discuss these different interpretations and the usage of socio-religious and cultural concepts, it is worth describing local Islamic practices.

The Muslim Community in Langkawi

Many scholars of Islam have acknowledged the diversity and complexity of communities that profess Islam. The diversity is clearly seen among Muslims from different continents, whether they are from the Middle East, Africa, South Asia or Southeast Asia and whether Islam is the dominant religion or practised only by minorities (Al-Shahi 1987). It has been widely documented that Islam in Southeast Asia is very much adapted and practised as a local tradition, and often reflects local contexts in which Islam differentiates itself from its counterpart in the Middle East or other parts of the world (Hooker 1983; Bowen 1993). Even these studies appear to be at variance with one another, and Southeast Asian specialists have questioned their general applicability (see Ellen 1983).

One reason for this variance is due to the nature of Islam itself. Islam is based on five pillars, which are also the framework of Muslim life: confession of faith, worship, fasting, alms and pilgrimage. Although these five pillars of Islam seem tangible and open to analysis, internally held values are less accessible to Muslims. Hence, the tenets of these five pillars are open to interpretation among Muslims themselves. The fact that

Islam has five different sects (legal traditions) has increased the possibility of different interpretation and practice.²

Therefore, I suggest that in the study of the impact of tourism, 'religious faith' (*pegangan agama*) should not be taken for granted, particularly in a Muslim community. This was emphasised by Din (1989b), who argued that the often-claimed resistance by people in the host countries, particularly Muslims, was not solely resistance to tourism itself, but the result of the conflict between Islamic and what Din referred as 'touristic values.' Examples included the consumption of *arak*, gambling, prostitution and the eating of unlawful food.³ In fact, Black (1996), who researched the impact of tourism on the village of Melleiha in Malta, emphasised the importance of religion in shaping local ideas about cultural integrity and identity. To Malays, Islam is more than just a religion: it is a way of life (Taib 1985). Studies of other Muslim societies also emphasise this point (Levy 1969; Gellner 1981). Hence, Muslim perceptions of various issues are greatly influenced by religious belief. The existence of different interpretations and practices among Muslims has created complications in the Muslim community. However, it is worth mentioning here that the conflict and discourse which arose on Langkawi should not be perceived simply as resistance to the local tourist industry, but rather as a manifestation of the efforts by the villagers of Kg Senang to integrate it and at the same time maintain their values as *orang Islam*.

Conflict arising from the debate on what is truly Islam and what is un-Islamic is not uncommon in Malaysian communities, particularly between the government, the Religious Department and Islamic movements. The debate is clearly manifested in Malaysian politics (Kessler 1978; Nagata 1982, 1984; Mutalib 1993; Shamsul 1994).

² Malaysian Muslims are almost entirely Sunni Sect, that is, followers of the orthodox Shafi'i school of interpretation.

³ See also Aziz (1995).

The two major Malay political parties, UMNO ⁴ (the United Malays National Organisation) and PAS (the Islamic Party), have different ideas and strategies of defining their role in Malaysian politics. ⁵ UMNO, the ruling political party, places stress on the protection and propagation of Malay nationalism. While PAS also upholds this policy, its primary stress is on Islamic principles and values. The conflict between these two groups has mainly focused on *how or to what extent* the state should be based on Islamic principles. While PAS's aim is to implement an Islamic state and Islamic law, the UMNO leader, Mahathir Mohamed, has a different opinion of the direction in which to move (see Shamsul 1994). One may presume that the existence of two political parties may greatly influence local perceptions, creating two contradictory views. To verify this and therefore explicate the debate on Islam and Islamic values on Langkawi, it is vital here to elucidate the current relationship between PAS and UMNO in Kg Senang.

Almost 90 per cent of the population of Langkawi Island are Malay Muslims. In Kg Senang, almost all the villagers are Malay Muslims. On Langkawi, as in other states in Malaysia, the loyal PAS and UMNO followers are normally called *orang* PAS (PAS people) or *orang* UMNO (UMNO people). The numbers of supporters of these two parties vary from village to village. For example, if one says, "PAS in that village is very strong", it indicates that many of the people in that particular village are PAS followers. On Langkawi, Carsten (1997) noted the political division between followers of the ruling UMNO and those of PAS. She observed that the division among local Muslims led to disputes over economic resources, such as government benefits which

⁴ UMNO is part of the alliance party, Barisan Nasional (the National Front) with MCA (Malayan Chinese Association), the major Chinese party in the ruling coalition and MIC (Malayan Indian Association).

⁵ See also "Malaysia's Muslims: Two Images, One Spirit" and 'Politics and the Divided Congregation' in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 January 1987.

were given only to government supporters, and that the followers of the two parties were attending different mosques for prayer (ibid. 138).

During the first few months of my fieldwork, I was introduced to two different families in different villages before I eventually settled with my foster family in Kg Senang. My stay with different people gave me the opportunity to observe and experience the relationship between PAS and UMNO, a chance I should have missed had I been confined to only one village. It was in the first village that I gained my first experience in dealing with PAS people. Within three days of my arrival in the village, I was brought by my foster father to visit his relatives. He pointed out to me that the situation was less strained compared with that of several years ago. At that time, he told me, the differences in their political ideology had been manifested openly. PAS people considered themselves good Muslims, whereas they considered UMNO people not truly Muslim. Members of one party would not attend any *kenduri* (feast) hosted by the other party, whether or not an invitation had been extended. PAS people said that they had refused to eat the meal served at a *kenduri* hosted by UMNO people because it was not clean. When I asked my foster father why the PAS people had said that, he told me that it was because the ingredients had been bought from local Chinese who were not Muslim. However, UMNO people claimed that the PAS's refusal to eat the meal offended the host and therefore soured the relationship between them. Relations between them were tense when the UMNO and the PAS prayed in different mosques, their followers separating by party at the door.

However, I was repeatedly told by my informants that the hostility between the local PAS and UMNO had gradually diminished, at least in public, when the debate about their differences quietened down. The villagers, whom I met often tried to

convince me of the amicable relations between the two parties, arguing that public debate between them had become extremely rare nowadays. My neighbour, in trying to explain this new scenario, told me that only now could he talk to his own brother, who was a strong PAS follower, without arguing about politics. He said, "At least now I can talk to him...but I still avoid talking about politics." During my fieldwork, open conflict between these two political parties was almost unheard of.

Although I did not experience any unpleasant situations when dealing with people from both parties, I noticed that the tension was still there. The only way to avoid it when two people from the different parties met was to avoid any discussion of politics because it might lead to a long and heated argument, which neither wanted. The state of relations between PAS and UMNO on Langkawi today was summed up by a local man: "Things have changed now; it is not like it was a few years ago" (*sekarang dah berubah, tak macam dulu*). When I demanded a reason for this change, my informant told me that these two groups, had become 'wiser' (*dah cerdik*), because now they could "differentiate between a religious movement and a political party". It was observed during my fieldwork that local people preferred to keep their political ideology to themselves and avoid any discussion of their differences. Instead of referring themselves as "we *orang* PAS" or "we *orang* UMNO," they would generally refer themselves as "we *orang* Islam."

This subtle manifestation of differences between *orang* PAS and UMNO would explain why my sense of 'alertness' seemed to be unnecessary. I discovered this only after a month of my stay with my first foster family. One day I had an interview with Pak Yusuf, my foster mother's brother, who lived just a few metres from my foster mother's house. During the interview, I asked him about the current relations between the local PAS and UMNO. I had anticipated his answer but was left stunned when he

said that he used to have verbal fights (*perang mulut*) with his brother-in-law, who was also my foster father, owing to their different political ideology. I was really surprised that I had failed to notice that my foster father was a strong PAS follower. This explained why he always avoided my questions when asked about his opinion on the relations between PAS and UMNO. I did not have the courage to pursue the issue until three months before I left Langkawi for Scotland. As if I did not know his political preference, he just smiled and shook his head: "No...not anymore. It [the relationship] is OK today," without explaining further. This experience made me realise that although the differences between these two groups were less manifest, they were still divided in their political ideology. Indeed, I should emphasise here that the 'amicable' relations between PAS and UMNO on Langkawi today should not be taken for granted, for the differences between these two groups have not all dissolved.

***Arak*: Islamic Regulation and Moral Evaluation**

The selling, and serving of *arak* in the local shops, restaurants and hotels and the consumption of *arak* by a group of villagers have indeed created a debate among different groups of people in the local community. The fact that Muslims are supposed to maintain their Islamic identity by refraining from the consumption of unlawful food and *arak* shows the importance of this issue on Langkawi. Din (1989*b*) points out how the mode of operation of the international tourist industry is mainly Western-inspired, characterised by hedonism, permissiveness and foreignness, with a lack of cross-cultural understanding and communication (1989*b*: 26). He further argues that the Muslim host countries have certain regulations prohibiting these activities, but these did not really have much impact on the operation of tourist-related industries. On Langkawi, the debate was heightened among the local community as it underwent negotiation with the development of the local tourist industry.

On Langkawi, there were several Islamic issues that were clearly debated whereas others seemed to be accepted although they did not seem to comply with Islamic teachings. The emergence of the hotel industry, duty-free shops and supermarkets had increased the importation of *arak* to Langkawi. Not only was *arak* served in hotels and in non-Muslim restaurants, but it was easily accessible to local people at duty-free shops and shops owned by non-Muslims in their villages. In fact, *arak* had become the favourite souvenir for non-Muslim tourists to take back to friends and relatives at home, since it was much cheaper than on the mainland. One local man told me that the abundance of *arak* was also due to the fact that it was much cheaper than mineral water. I was told that a can of beer costs only 80 cents, 40 cents less than a bottle of mineral water.

I argue that local interpretation of *arak* was firmly based on the concept of the 'purification of the heart', which is much emphasised in Islamic teaching. Therefore, before I discuss how local people employed different interpretations and why this created a local discourse, let me explain first Islamic law ⁶ on this issue. According to Islamic teachings, Muslims are prohibited from consuming intoxicants ⁷ and pork. The abstention from these two items is articulated as the concept of the purification of one's nature (Sayed 1991). Muslims believe that:

Blood is virtually our life and what we consume ultimately affects the blood system, it is therefore necessary to

⁶ Islamic law is derived from two sources: the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an is the sacred text said to contain the collection of words revealed by Allah through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad during the years 610-622 AC. The Qur'an is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. The Hadith is a collection of short narratives told by people who knew the Prophet personally during his lifetime, handed down through the ages, which describe some act or saying of the Prophet which is to be taken as a guide. Belief in the Hadith is part of the Islamic faith.

⁷ Intoxicants refer to any substance that is drunk, smoked or injected into the body, making one confused and irrational.

exercise choice in the selection of our food and drink. Once food is consumed, it does not merely enter the intestines and becomes excreta, it is absorbed into the blood system and circulated to all parts of the human body, including the brain, and this, in no small way, affects man's nature.

(Sayed 1991: 7)⁸

To maintain this purification of the blood, intoxicants, especially alcohol, are unlawful (*haram*) for Muslims. The prohibition includes not only their consumption, but also the handling of intoxicants, such as displaying, selling or serving alcohol. In the Qur'an it is also stated:

Eating the lawful relates not only to the things we eat but also to the way we earn money with which to buy the food and other things; we must not only eschew forbidden food such as pork, but we must also shun unlawful means of earning a living and make otherwise lawful articles of food unlawful and detrimental to our spiritual being.

(Qur'an 2:168)

In the following discussion, I shall describe how the above two Islamic rulings influenced the attitude of the Langkawi islanders towards those who consumed, sold or served *arak*.

In local terms, any kind of alcoholic drink was referred to as *arak*. Before the declaration of Langkawi Island as a duty-free port, the amount of *arak* sold in the markets in the town was very small and almost none was sold at the grocery shops in the villages. Many of the villagers told me that they had never touched a bottle of *arak* and some of them had never even seen one before. Some of them said that they only

⁸ I use Sayed's description (1991) of the concept of the purification of heart, which has been emphasised in the Qur'an, to relate to my discussion of the same concept used by the people of Langkawi.

knew what it looked like from watching TV programmes. However, the declaration of duty-free status increased the availability of *arak* in its various forms at the local markets on Langkawi. Shopping complexes, duty-free shops all offered different types of *arak*. Small grocery shops owned by Chinese outside the village began to sell *arak*, which was sometimes placed alongside the soft drinks in the refrigerator. Since some of the cans of *arak* were of a similar size and design to other soft drinks, a few school children claimed that they were confused and could not always differentiate between Coca-Cola and *arak*.

The local Deputy-Director of Education told me of several cases of students buying *arak*. Sometimes she found her experience quite amusing, such as the occasion when four primary schoolchildren came staggering into school. When she asked the children what had happened to them, they said that they had just had a few sips of a can of drink, which they claimed tasted “sweet and sour”. She then found out that the children had drunk a bottle of *arak* which they had bought at the local Chinese shop. They claimed that they just wanted to try a new flavour and could not differentiate it from the other, non-alcoholic, drinks placed alongside.

For local people, drinking *arak* was unacceptable behaviour, particularly if it was done in public. Suffian, the imam in the village explained to me that drinking *arak* was not like ‘drinking water’ (*minum air*), for it had a particular effect on the drinker. He said that whatever one consumed became flesh and blood (*darah daging*), and therefore one should be careful of what one consumed so as to maintain the purity (*kesucian*) of the blood. He explained that consuming *haram* drink or food would contaminate the blood, and it was believed that this would leave a black spot (*titik hitam*) on one’s heart. The constant contamination of the blood by consuming *haram* food would eventually ‘blacken the whole heart’ (*menghitamkan hati*). Suffian argued that once one’s heart had

'black' (*hitam*), then it would be difficult to accept divine teachings, and instead of doing good deeds (*perkara kebaikan*), one would easily be led astray. The difficulties in doing good deeds would then lead to weakness of *iman* (faith). This concept of *iman* is closely related to the concepts of *nafsu* (passion/desire) and shame (*malu*) which are strongly emphasised in Malay society. These three concepts are closely interlinked and are often used by local people to explain why a person could be involved in immoral activities.

Nafsu originates from the Arabic word *nafs*, which refers to passion, desire and lust. Although it does not necessarily carry derogatory connotations, in this discussion, *nafsu* is often defined by local people as a 'bad desire' to behave in a way that is against Islamic teachings. Peletz (1996) argued that *nafsu* (desire/passion) in Muslim society frequently carries derogatory connotations: to be overly interested in sex, to over eat, to have a beautiful house, to have worldly material desires. This *nafsu*⁹ was often associated with the devil, locally termed *syaitan* (Satan), who always tempts Muslims to indulge in sinful behaviour. Therefore, to avoid being led astray, Muslims are expected to control their *nafsu* by constantly strengthening their faith. Suffian explained to me that 'having shame' (*tau malu*) was important for the control of *nafsu*. This concept of shame is also widely used in other Muslims countries (Abu-Lughod 1992; Peletz 1996). In Malay society, the concept of *malu* is used to refer not only to an attitude but also to the consequences of being *malu* (bringing shame). Suffian argued that if one had no *malu* then one had no self-respect (*tak ada harga diri*). This was parallel to Peletz's argument that, "restraint and control of the inner self are strongly

⁹ The similarity of discussion of the meaning of *nafsu* and *akal* can be found in the work of Rosen (1978: 567) on the Sefrou people in Morocco. The Sefrou people argued: "*Nefs* is really all the thoughts and attitudes we have that lead us to do bad things. It is all the things we share in common with the animals, all the passions and lusts. Sometimes these desires are necessary for doing good things, but then only if they are guided by reason. And that is what 'aqel (reason) means: reason, rationality, the ability to use our heads in order to keep our passions from getting hold of us and controlling us" (Rosen 1978: 567).

marked moral virtues which bring prestige while the absence of restraint portrays a lack of virtue” (1996: 222).¹⁰

If someone were seen drinking *arak* in front of others, he would be viewed as someone who had ‘no shame’ (*tak tahu malu*). This would portray his low degree of morality and therefore he could lose his dignity and respect in the eyes of his neighbours. I was told that to say that one was ‘drinking *arak*’ (*dia tu minum*) was tantamount to an accusation of *rosak moral* (lit. broken morals). A person’s reputation could be ruined if he began to get drunk in public. The close association of *malu* and *iman* in Malay culture can be illustrated by the Malay proverb: “Shame is half of *iman*” (*malu adalah separuh daripada iman*), which means that the degree of *malu* is heavily dependent on the strength of *iman*. For example, to have a strong *iman* is to have a strong sense of shame (*tau malu*). As one local man said to me, “If they have strong *iman*, they don’t drink” (*dia tak minum kalau dia kuat iman*). For villagers, the avoidance of drinking *arak* was closely related to the control of their *nafsu*. One person told me that the *syaitan* (devil) was always trying to coax them into behaviour that was contrary to Islamic teachings. Only by having strong *iman* could one defend oneself from all these temptations. Hence, those who took part in immoral activities, such as receiving a *haram* income to gain ‘instant profit’ (*untung cepat*), or drinking or serving *arak*, were viewed by the villagers as having a weak *iman*.

Since many of villagers had no experience of drinking *arak*, they did not know the extent of the effects of alcohol on them. I was told of a few cases where local youths

¹⁰ Peletz explained that *malu* was used by Malays to denote a state of ‘shame’ (being ashamed), shyness (being shy). These are qualities that children can acquire by socialisation and active intervention from parents. The acceptance of this concept determines how Malay individuals behave in their day-to-day activities. By having *malu*, one is expected to have more strength in restraining oneself from doing ‘bad things’ (1996: 222).

who were claimed to be drunk were killed in motorcycle accidents. There were two separate cases of local men in his early twenties who lost control of their motorcycle, which plunged into a ditch. One of them died instantly as he had a massive head injury. The local teacher, who went to the funeral, expressed his surprise to me that the father did not even show any sign of *malu* when he was boasting about his son's passion for fast driving. Several villagers who heard the news expressed their sympathy for the young man, who was said to 'die while in a sinful state' (*mati dalam keadaan berdosa*). It was undesirable to 'die whilst sinning', and they said to me that they always prayed that they would 'die whilst doing good' (*mati dalam kebaikan*). In the minds of the villagers, to die while on the way to the mosque, reading the Qur'an, or doing good deeds was to 'die whilst doing good.'

During one of my interviews with hotel managers, I met Daud, a young man in his mid-twenties who worked as a hotel guard and a gardener after office hours at the same hotel. He was a close friend of my neighbour, who also worked at the same hotel. He told me how he had been constantly persuaded by his friends to drink *arak* but vehemently refused to do so. He said that he wanted just to be a friend to them but did not want to be forced to drink *arak*. Since he refused it, his friends always teased him for being *lekeh* or *tak rock*. The words *lekeh* and *tak rock* are the jargon used by local youths to describe a person as 'old-fashioned,' or in modern English slang, 'uncool.' Daud asserted that sometimes, to avoid being labelled *lekeh*, some people would drink particularly those who had weak *iman*. Daud also said that some of them began to drink because they wanted to demonstrate their *terror*, to test how much alcohol they could take. In local language, *terror*¹¹ is often used by Malays to describe a kind of admiration of people those who can do something that not many other people can do, though it does not necessarily mean positive behaviour. Someone who can drink a lot before he

¹¹ *Terror* may be the equivalent of the English expression "bit of a terror" or "tearaway."

becomes really drunk is viewed as being *terror*. As one tourist guide explained to me, a person (who drank *arak*) would be praised by his friends because he could “drink *arak*, something that he is not supposed to drink [for it is against Islam] but he has the guts to do it. They’re doing it to gain recognition from their friends.” The tourist guide admitted to me that he used to drink *arak* but had stopped a year ago. He told me that many local youths drank *arak* because of the pressure from their peer group and because they were continually mixing with their work mates, a few of whom were outsiders who had been drinking *arak* for a very long time. He described these people as ‘already morally damaged’ (*dah rosak moral*) and as ones who ‘cannot take advice’ (*tak makan nasihat*) anymore. Daud proudly told me how he could restrain himself from drinking *arak* after being persuaded several times to do so. To do this, he maintained, “You have to have strong *iman*; if your *iman* is weak, then you’ll be carried away, so you have to control your own *nafsu*.”

I have shown the different views that local people had on the consumption of *arak*, and how these religious principles - *nafsu*, *malu* and *iman* – are closely related, which explains why the consumption of *arak* and pork dominated local discourse. In the following section, I discuss how local businessmen dealt with these Islamic values and how they inculcated these values in their businesses.

Business Ethics

In Kg Senang, many local villagers owned coastal land that was strategically placed for businesses such as restaurants, grocery shops and gift shops. However, much of this land had yet to be developed for the owners did not have enough capital to set up businesses. Many of the chalet operators in the village had their own restaurants, to cater not only for their own guests but also for the public. I was told that only a few of the restaurants

were really doing well; many others had been closed down owing to lack of capital to maintain them. To avoid suffering a loss, the owners had to let their restaurants. However, this had become a problem for them because not many Malay Muslims had enough capital to run the businesses. Instead, many tenders came from non-Muslims, particularly Chinese businessmen outside the village.

Besides operating a chalet, Suffian, the local imam, owned a restaurant, which he had let to Saad, one of the villagers. However, Saad had to stop trading because he could not afford to pay the rent. Since its closure, it had been very difficult for Suffian to find a new operator to run the restaurant. He received a tender from a Chinese businessman but rejected it, though the Chinese businessman was willing to pay a higher rent. The only explanation that Suffian could give for the rejection was: "He is not Muslim (*depa bukan orang Islam*). If he ran the restaurant, he would definitely sell *arak* and pork. I can't stop him from selling that. So, to avoid any problems, it would be easier to let it to a Muslim." The selling of *arak* by non-Muslim businessmen is inevitable, for it is often asserted to be the main attraction for tourists. Even though he was not going to run the restaurant himself, being its original owner, he would still be considered a collaborator in selling *arak* and therefore would share the sin (*dosa*). The fact that he had no say in the running of the business after the contract was signed would make it difficult for him to stop the operator from selling the unlawful items. Therefore, the money he might receive from the tender would be considered *haram*. Suffian maintained that earning money from *haram* sources should be totally avoided by an *orang Islam* because it would not be blessed by God (*tidak berkat*) and it would affect the well being of the person if the money was consumed. Suffian explained,

Whatever we eat becomes our flesh and blood (*darah daging*). So, if we eat this *haram* money, it will make our blood dirty (*darah kotor*). This same dirty blood will be

passed down to our children and it will influence the upbringing of our children. I don't want to feed my children from a *haram* source.

The connection between the consumption of food and drink from *haram* sources and the purity of blood is constantly emphasised by the Langkawi islanders. According to Suffian, blood is affected not only by food but also the sources of income. In this case, money could also tarnish the purity of the blood and therefore would affect the nature of a person. The source of the income, which would be used to feed children, should really be *halal* to maintain the purity of the blood of the next generation. Carsten (1997) discusses the importance of blood (*darah*) and its connection with food and kinship among the people on Langkawi. She argues 'blood is formed in the body from food cooked in the house hearth' and is continually being formed and transformed. She also explains the significance of cooking and eating in houses in creating connectedness between kin. Carsten's discussion has explained why Langkawi people are so careful about the source of the food that they consume. The villagers told me that once the blood was contaminated by a *haram* source, it would be passed down to the next generation.

One local woman told me that a child was formed from a clot of blood (*dari seketul darah*) and that the child's growth was nourished by the milk from its mother's breast (*susu ibu*). This *susu ibu* is also produced from the mother's blood. The close association of the blood with the formation of a child shows the importance of the purity of the blood (see also Carsten 1997 who argues that the mother's milk has a significant influence on the child's physical and emotional development). Therefore the villagers checked very carefully the source of the food that they ate.

Suffian's argument was similar to that stated in Islamic teachings namely that Muslims should not only refrain from eating *haram* food but should also shun any

haram means of earning a living. According to Islamic teachings, any deceptive, exploitative or indecent way of procuring money is considered *haram*, as is the consumption of the products of such unlawful labour. I have shown that the villagers' avoidance of the consumption of *haram* items, either directly or indirectly, is very much related to the concept of self-purification and faith (*iman*), which are greatly emphasised in Islamic teachings. This argument may go back to the meaning of Islam itself, which refers to "the spiritual (metaphysical) and material (physical) submission in surrender and peace, with the guarantee of health, safety and security" (Din 1989b: 21). He argues that "it is all the matter of both, the heart as well as the mind, of both the metaphysical as well as the physical (ibid. 21).

Hence, to avoid this consumption of income from a *haram* source, Suffian preferred to lease his restaurant to a Muslim rather than a non-Muslim. By doing so, at least he knew that Islamic values could be continuously maintained. I suggest that this combination of 'spiritual' and 'material' values had indeed become the line of demarcation for this group of Langkawi people to refrain from gaining something from *haram* sources. They knew that they could make a higher profit by selling *arak* but they argued that, as *orang Islam*, their main priority was to achieve *berkat* (God's blessing).

Villagers emphasised that their reluctance in leasing restaurants or land to non-Muslims was not because the non-Muslims were of a different ethnic group, but because the villagers were influenced by their beliefs and practices as *orang Islam*. Although they emphasised this point, it seemed to me that the fact that the non-Muslims were from different ethnic groups should not be underplayed, for the discourse of ethnicity in Malaysia is closely linked to religion (Kahn 1992; Muhammad Ikmal 1996). Villagers often referred to 'non-Muslim' (*bukan Islam*) instead of the ethnic group. However, I also sometimes heard Suffian assert that it would be difficult to lease property to the

Chinese because “once we give something to them [the Chinese], it will be difficult to get it back.” He said, “They will use various strategies to keep their right to that property.” But every time I asked him why he did not lease it to the Chinese, his answer was, “It’s not that we don’t want to lease it to them. If we give the tender to them, they must sell *arak* and pork. They can’t avoid that since *arak* is the main source of profit for their business.”

The refusal to lease business premises to non-Muslims can be illustrated by the following story. Ahmad was a local chalet operator who also owned a restaurant which had been closed down for nearly two months owing to a shortage of capital to run. One day a Malay man from a neighbouring village came to see him to ask about the restaurant. The Malay agreed to pay a rent of RM 1500 per month. Ahmad was really happy for that was the highest offer that he had received since the closure of his restaurant. Although there were several local men wanting to tender for the lease, they asserted that the rent was too high. So the preparation of the contract went smoothly until the day when Ahmad had to sign it. He was really shocked to discover that one of the clauses included permission to sell *arak*. On demanding some clarification, he then realised that the actual tenant was not the Malay, but a Chinese businessman who owned a grocery shop in the town. He had asked his Malay friend to act as middleman because he knew that it would be difficult for his own tender to be accepted. Ahmad was so furious that he refused to sign the contract unless that particular clause was deleted. However, the Malay middleman insisted on retaining the clause, so Ahmad finally had to reject the contract. Although he realised that he was losing a potential source of income, he never regretted it, for he maintained that it was just not his *rezeki* (God’s bounties). He believed that each individual profited from God’s bounties, and as *orang Islam*, this should be done to retain one’s Islamic identity. Ahmad argued that

one's adherence to this principle would be rewarded by god's blessing (*berkat*), which would lead to peace, security and harmony granted by God.

In view of this attitude, there were very few cases of villagers leasing their business premises to non-Muslims. The above discussion shows how a group of local people, especially those who played a part in tourism, made an effort to increase their income while at the same time managing to retain their Islamic identity. It also illustrates how they applied moral and ethical values to their businesses. Although they realised that the aim of a business was to make a profit, they also did their best not to neglect their moral obligations as *orang Islam*. Their argument was based on religious principles to explain their responsibility to God. They believed that success in business meant not only a higher profit but also the retention of their Islamic values.

The majority of the chalet operators whom I met explained to me that they would inform non-Muslim tourists that they did not sell *arak*. They would advise the tourists to go instead to the nearest hotel or non-Muslim restaurant where *arak* was available. The tourists who wanted to bring alcohol were advised not to bring alcohol into their room or else they had to remove the bottle before they left.¹² I was told that there were several cases where non-Muslim tourists cancelled their chalet bookings when they were informed that the chalet operator did not sell *arak*. Occasionally, a misunderstanding occurred between a chalet operator and a tourist, owing to the chalet operator's slight knowledge of English. One chalet operator, Bohari, recalled one of his experiences with a young German tourist who asked Bohari whether he could keep his two bottles of *arak* in his refrigerator. Bohari politely said that he could not do that because "We are Muslim, alcoholic drink is not allowed here. We cannot drink that."

¹² This would be different in hotels. *Arak* was available in most of the hotels on Langkawi Island and guests were free to drink in the hotel area.

The young tourist looked confused and demanded further explanation. However, since Bohari's English was quite limited, he could not explain why but repeatedly said, "We cannot drink alcohol." The young tourist was quite annoyed and accused Bohari of being unhelpful.

Initially, I was quite puzzled why *arak* was not allowed in the chalet rooms, since this would discourage non-Muslim tourists from staying at chalets operated by local Muslims. However, it was revealed that the prohibition was based not so much on the act of drinking *arak*, but on the fear that drunks might disturb the other guests. The following anecdote illustrates how such an attitude is strongly held by the local entrepreneurs. Shima, a 20-year-old mother of one son, was helping her brothers-in-law run the chalet business, especially during the day. Since she also had to take care of her little boy, her mother-in-law would accompany her and look after her grandson. Shima might have appeared very shy, but behind that long headscarf she was a very strict person. She never wore any make-up, but always wore the *baju kurung* (traditional dress). She had been in the chalet business with her brother-in-law since her husband had died of cancer three months before I arrived in the village.

We were sitting and chatting in her reception office when she started talking about her experience in dealing with drunken guests. When I asked her why alcohol was prohibited in her chalets, she explained to me that it was not that she was trying to stop visitors from staying at her chalets, but it would be difficult for her to handle drunken guests who were disturbing her other guests. One experience in particular made her determined not to allow her guests to bring *arak* into their rooms. One night, a non-Muslim tourist from Kuala Lumpur got drunk outside his chalet room. He then started to disturb a group of Malay Muslim girls who were staying in the next chalet. The girls became hysterical when the man stood outside their chalet and started shouting abuse.

Shima, who was at the time in the reception office, heard the loud screams. She was scared and asked her mother-in-law to see what was actually happening. A few minutes later, her mother-in-law came back, looking absolutely furious and told her that one of her guests was drunk. Her mother-in-law grabbed a broom and ran towards the man's chalet. She chased the man out of the chalet area and sent him running towards the beach, where he disappeared. Several hours later, he came back to his chalet room. Shima argued that she was not stopping her guests from drinking alcohol but she felt that they should refrain from getting drunk so that her other guests would not be disturbed. She was even more annoyed to discover that it was the non-Muslim domestic tourists, who were supposed to know local values, who gave more trouble than the foreign tourists. She told me, "The local tourists (non-Muslim) seem to behave worse than foreign tourist. I never had any experience of foreign tourists being drunk. They would go to the hotel to drink."

To avoid this happening again, not only did Shima have to explain to her guests that *arak* was not allowed in her chalet rooms, but also to ask them to behave themselves and not to disturb the other guests. It was not an easy task, for Shima had to be careful not to offend her guests. She insisted that she had to do this to uphold "our values as *orang Islam*, and my husband repeatedly reminded me to uphold these values." She said:

I cannot accept that [behaviour], because my husband was such a pious (*warak*) person and he did not like all these activities happening in his chalets. So, I have to remember that and maintain [his standards].

So far, I have described the perseverance of a group of local people in upholding what they referred to as their "values as *orang Islam*" and at the same time playing an active

part in tourism. It is also clear that their arguments and interpretations in this process were based heavily on what was already stated and emphasised in Islamic law.

The above discussion portrays how local people, particularly those directly connected with tourism, negotiated their economic practices with their Islamic values. It shows how they were making a greater effort to uphold their Islamic values than to gain economically. This was based on their emphasis on the concept of *rezeki* (God's bounties) and the consequences of earning an income from *haram* sources. Shima, for example, believed that to have *berkat* (God's blessing) on a business, one should avoid any immoral behaviour. She argued that *berkat* would then lead to harmony granted by God in this world and in the everlasting life in the hereafter. The discussion also shows how Islam was used as a 'tool' in defining the limit of legitimate business: where to draw the line between what was *haram* and what was *halal*. Clearly business decisions were very closely associated with Islamic principles.

The emphasis on *halal* sources of income applies not only to the prohibition of the sale of *arak* and its consumption in the chalets, but also to collaboration (*subahat*) with *khalwat*. In Malay, *khalwat*,¹³ which is derived from Arabic, means the seclusion of an unmarried couple in an isolated place. According to the Sharia' Law of Kedah,

Any Muslim person who is found in retirement or in close proximity, or in suspicious circumstances in any place, with a person other than by reason of consanguinity, affinity or fosterage he is forbidden to marry, shall be guilty of *khalwat* and on conviction shall be punishable with a fine not exceeding RM 200 or imprisonment not exceeding two months or both.

(Amran 1991: 196)

¹³ In Islamic terms, "*khalwat* signifies solitude to meditate upon God and to remember Him constantly by reciting His name repeatedly in the heart, mind or audibly" (Al-Attas 1963: 30).

In Malay society, those who have committed *khalwat* are considered to have brought shame upon the whole family, especially the parents. The degree of shame is greater if *khalwat* is committed by a Malay girl, and the couple are accused of 'covering the faces with charcoal' (*menconteng arang ke muka*), that is, blackening the reputation of the families. They have lost their dignity (*maruah*) in the eyes of society, which is really irreparable. To restore the dignity of the family and to pay for his guilt, the man is sometimes forced - and threatened if he refuses - to marry the girl (Amran 1991).

Villagers who own houses and chalets for rental face a difficult situation. Such accommodation is much in demand by people of both sexes from outside Langkawi, so the villagers have to monitor their tenants carefully. One villager, Pak Man, was known in the local community as one of the richest men in Langkawi. He had several acres of land and had received millions of *ringgits* from land sales. He also owned a number of houses (*rumah sewa*) for rental and a hostel block accommodating hotel employees (especially outsiders) who were working at the nearby hotel. All his houses for letting were situated either in his home compound or a few metres away from his house. The hostel was less than a minute's walk from the house of Suffian, the local imam, who was also the owner of a chalet. Pak Man's tenants included hotel workers, tourists and civil servants from outside Langkawi. Most of the hotel workers were young unmarried men and women. One day Pak Man expressed his concern to me about the behaviour of a particular group. He said that the arrival of so many young workers from outside Langkawi had encouraged the mixing of men and women in his houses for rental, which had led to several cases of *khalwat*.

Pak Man wanted to make a profit from his business; at the same time, however, he did not want to be collaborating with this *maksiat* (sinful activities). He was

aware of his responsibility, not only as an elder (*orang tua*) in the village but also as a Muslim. Therefore, he had to negotiate his position as a local businessman with his values as an *orang Islam*. Although, he could have imposed stricter rules by asking his tenants to leave immediately if he ever found out that they had indulged in unacceptable behaviour, he realised that such an attitude might not be appropriate for his business. Furthermore, since most of the tenants were outsiders, he did not feel that he had the 'authority' to reprimand them. As he told me, "Actually we [local villagers] *should* remind them, but we can't do much because many of them are outsiders. Who are we to correct them? we're not their parents...we're not even their relatives." However, he emphasised that his tenants would be reprimanded if they were caught committing *khalwat* or bringing members of the opposite sex into the house. The close proximity between his house and the houses for rental enabled him, in some ways, to observe those activities. However, to improve vigilance, Pak Man would make sure that his new tenants understood his rules - that bringing of alcohol and members of the opposite sex into the house was prohibited - before allowing them to move in. To emphasise his concern, he would remind them of his close connection with the local Religious Officer, whom he would not hesitate to call if he encountered any of his unmarried Muslim tenants breaking the rules. He seemed very much in earnest when he insisted, "I don't want to collaborate (*subahat*) with any sinful activities (*maksiat*)."¹⁴

The effort to maintain such standards was manifested in various ways. For example, one chalet operator told me that he would ask his Muslim guests to produce their identity cards (*kad pengenalan*) or marriage certificates if he was suspicious about the guests' ages or their marital status. He told me firmly that he could not tolerate an unmarried couple sharing a room. There was one occasion, he said, when a young

¹⁴ *Maksiat* also refers to the act of breaking God's laws.

couple in their early twenties came to his chalet to book a room. Although the couple told him that they were husband and wife, he was rather suspicious for they seemed to be very young. He then asked them to produce their marriage certificate but they failed to do so. He told them that he could not let them stay in his chalet and advised them to find another chalet. They were really annoyed and still insisted on staying at his chalet. However, when he warned them that he had a close contact with someone in the Religious Department, the couple left. He was really angry when he told me: "I don't care whether I get customers or not; I just don't want to share the sin."

Pak Man also emphasised that he was scared to share the sin by allowing such behaviour to occur in front of his own eyes. He said, "I don't want to get involved with that *maksiat*...I'm only looking for an honest livelihood (*rezeki halal*). "When I told him that he might lose potential customers because some of them might not agree with his rules, he said calmly: "What can I say? It is just not my lot (*rezeki*). It's just not destined for me." This example shows how the concept of *rezeki* was emphasised in the villagers' business activities. It also highlights their apparent awareness that adhering to Islamic values was more important than making a profit from a *haram* source. The application of the concept of *rezeki* in business could prevent a person from making a *haram* profit. The villagers believed that each individual had his/her own *rezeki* already allocated to them by God.¹⁵ As long as one upheld Islamic values, God would always compensate with *rezeki* in other ways.

The Concept of 'Faith' (*Iman*) and 'Taking Care of Oneself' (*Pandai Jaga Diri*)

I have described above how the interpretation of the issue of *arak* differed from one person to another, depending on individual circumstances. I also argue that the villagers

¹⁵ See Norazit (1996) for a discussion on the different types of *rezeki* in Malay society.

were attracted to hotel employment because it provided them with an extra regular income for themselves and their households. At the same time, they did not want to be stigmatised. To discourage such gossip, the villagers argued that there was nothing wrong with hotel employment as long as one had 'strong faith' (*kuat iman*) and knew about 'taking care of oneself' (*pandai jaga diri*). The emphasis on these two concepts was used to justify hotel employment or to convince themselves that they would manage to avoid any involvement in 'immoral activities.'

Villagers argued that since the prohibition of the consumption of and dealing with alcohol related to surmounting one's own *nafsu* (desire), anybody could work anywhere as long as two concepts were observed: 'strong faith' and knowing how 'to take care of oneself.' To recognise their arguments, it is important to understand these religious principles. I shall describe how these concepts are closely related and carry the original meaning of fundamental Islamic teaching. I have explained earlier that 'faith' is called *Iman* and this *iman* is the main foundation of the Five Pillars of Islam. *Iman* provides a "justification in the heart, recognition and acknowledgement by the mind of [the] truth of the doctrine that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his apostle" (Levy 1969: 192). My informants argued that those Five Pillars should be constantly observed to strengthen the *iman*. They maintained that failure in doing so would result in the lack of *iman* or 'weak *iman*' (*lemah iman*) and therefore one would be easily dominated by *nafsu*, which would lead to participation in wrongdoing (*perkara tak baik*).

The concept of *pandai jaga diri* (looking after oneself properly) is a combination of several values that are emphasised in Malay culture including the awareness of shame (*malu*). *Pandai jaga diri* has a strong ethical value. It is more than the physical control of one's own *nafsu* for it uses *akal* (reason) to differentiate between right and wrong.

The awareness of *malu* is its main element for a certain degree of *malu* is necessary to 'control bad *nafsu*' (*nafsu jahat*).

In the following discussion I show how these two concepts were constantly used by the villagers in reshaping the earlier perception of hotel employment. In the past, it was difficult for villagers, particularly young women to work as hotel chambermaids owing to the stigma attached to the job. Hotel employment (*kerja hotel*) often suggested the danger of becoming victims of gossip since the employees were seen as risking intimate contact with tourists of the opposite sex with the possibility of being led astray. In Malay society, women are expected to demonstrate appropriate shame by avoiding too much mixing with men. The villagers told of how the older generation always thought that hotel employment included entertaining the guests.

I was often told that the main reason why many of the villagers were reluctant to let their children work in the hotels was because they feared that they would be required to serve *arak* or that they would be exposed to immoral activities. This can be illustrated by the following story. Suraya was just 17 and had left school when she was 16. She had lost interest in continuing her studies, so she spent her time at home helping her mother with the housework and taking care of her younger siblings. One day Suraya told her mother that she wanted to work as a waitress at the three-star hotel outside her village. She knew that her mother would object because she had suggested it before. Her mother objected because she was scared that Suraya would have to serve *arak* and might become involved with immoral activities. Suraya tried various strategies to convince her mother, telling her that many of her friends were working in hotels and they received their own wages every month. Suraya told me that her mother's objection was due to her lack of knowledge of the hotel employment available, always maintaining that "it was not appropriate for women to work in hotels." Suraya insisted, "I don't want to do bad

things, I just want to have some money.” One day I was chatting with her mother outside her house with her neighbour when her mother began to confide in me about Suraya. She said, “It’s not that I want to stop her from working; it’s good for at least she can help her younger brother. But I’m scared that she might become involved in bad things.” At this point, her neighbour interrupted. She told Suraya’s mother that there was nothing wrong with hotel work, because many of her friends were thus employed. Trying to convince Suraya’s mother, she said,

It was different before; today is different...[village] people are becoming knowledgeable (*dah cerdik*). A hotel is not a place for *maksiat*. Working in a hotel is like working in an office. You don’t have to worry...as long as she can ‘take care of herself’. Have a ‘strong *iman*’ and work. Everything will be OK.

The above example shows how the perception of hotel employment gradually changed with the application of religious principles – ‘strong *iman*’ and ‘taking care of oneself.’ The result was that an increasing number of local women began working in hotels. The effort made to change this perception was also due to the fact that hotels offered various low-skilled jobs that suited the villagers, who had little education, and that gave them a regular income. I argue that the idiom of ‘becoming knowledgeable’ was used by the villagers to discredit the earlier perception. It became a means of justification to enable them to work in hotels without the stigma of ‘immoral activities.’

Near my foster sister’s house, were one international hotel and five other hotels. In addition, there were the chalets, which were mostly situated along the main road near my house. Many of the villagers, young men and women and older married men and women, were employed in these hotels and restaurants. Since most of them did not have high qualifications, they were employed in the low-skilled jobs, such as housekeepers, kitchen and laundry staff, and gardeners. The young men and women were mostly

receptionists or waiters. Although their work might be low-paid, since they had never had waged employment before, they considered that earning RM500 to RM600 a month was 'good money.'

Tijah, at 41, had never had any experience of waged employment in her entire life. She was living in a small wooden house with her sick 71-year-old husband and 16-year-old daughter. Previously she had depended on her husband to support the family, but since her husband had stopped going to sea a few months before owing to old age, she decided to take up paid work instead. She was trying to find work as a restaurant waitress but it was not easy to get a job at her age, as she said, "They want a young girl, not an old woman like me." One day, her friend, who worked in the laundry of a five-star hotel outside the village, told her that she could work as a dishwasher. She said that the hotel management was looking for somebody older because no young girl wanted to work in that department. Tijah told her husband of her intention, and he had no choice but to let her go out to work for he realised that one of them had to provide the main income for the family. She was told that she could earn between RM500 and RM600 per month. As she told me, "Who will give you RM500 or RM600 per month...I have never earned this amount of money in my life before. Rather than wasting my time at home, I might as well work. It's really good money."

Her life as a 'dishwasher' thus began. She would spend the morning cleaning the house and cooking lunch with the help of her mentally retarded daughter. Her husband would spend his time sitting on a *pangkin*¹⁶ under the house. After lunch, they spent the afternoon on the *pangkin*, chatting with neighbours who would call in. About five o'clock, Tijah would get ready to go to work. Wearing baggy black trousers, a long

¹⁶ *Pangkin* is a low wooden bench without a back, on which people sit or lie down underneath the traditional wooden house on stilts.

loose blouse and faded headscarf, she walked to the main road, not far from her house, to wait for the hotel van to collect her. After a few minutes, the van arrived and took her to the hotel. While she was at work, her daughter took care of the house and her father. After working for a few days, Tijah realised that there was not much difference between working in a hotel and working at home. "It's not that difficult; it's just like washing dishes at home...the difference is that I get money for doing that." Asked if she had received any unpleasant comments from neighbours or friends since she had started work, she was not surprised that no one said anything bad about her, because "many of them know what I am doing."

I see many young hotel workers but they are OK...I don't really get involved with them, but they are 'good'. Of course, some of them do behave badly but if you can have strong *iman* and know how to take care of yourself...no problem.

It is argued here that the attitude towards hotel employment gradually changed. The application of those two concepts seemed to be necessary to enable the villagers to take up an employment, which provided them with an income. As Tijah pointed out to me, "If we were always to follow what our elders said, then we shouldn't go anywhere. They have that attitude because they are 'less knowledgeable' (*kurang cerdas*)...they don't know what it's like to work in hotels." Based on Tijah's explanation, the earlier perception could no longer be upheld if the villagers wanted to participate in the local tourist industry and embark upon 'modernity.' To enable them to work in hotels for a regular income, they often reiterated, like Tijah, "The people of today are not like the people of the past" (*orang sekarang tak macam orang dulu*).

The practice of dissociating perceptions of the 'people of the past' with the 'people of today' was a manifestation of how the villagers perceived that the latter were

becoming more 'open-minded' (*fikiran terbuka*). This can also be seen as a symbol of being modern. The villagers did not want the past perception to prevent them from working in hotels. Therefore, the adoption of a new perception was necessary to remove the stigma of 'bad behaviour' from hotel employment. Brenner (1996) describes how the Javanese Muslim women who adopted the veil invoked the idiom of 'becoming aware' as a means of distancing themselves from their own past to re-create themselves as modern Muslims. As Brenner argues, "Modernity is characterised by the self-consciousness of those who define themselves and their age against the past and in anticipation of the future; to turn toward the future is simultaneously to deny the past's hold on the present (1996: 681). However, in Kg Senang, this is not to say that the villagers were trying to break completely with the past. Their aim was to change only certain perceptions while maintaining other values.

The fact that many married women were working in the hotels also opened the villagers' eyes to the realisation that hotel employment was not restricted to young unmarried girls. One local man asserted that it had become normal nowadays to see both young unmarried and older married women on their way to do their evening shift. One young woman who had been working for a year at the hotel outside her village told me, "why do they [the villagers] have to worry? The hotel van takes us to work, and when we have finished, it takes us back. We don't have time to go anywhere." It was also observed that the concept of *pandai jaga diri* was frequently used by parents or older people as a reminder to their children to be on their guard against any involvement in immoral activities. As one of the local people told me,

If they want to do bad things or do something shameful,
they can do that without having to work in a hotel. The
important thing is that they must know about *jaga diri*.

Contradictory Views

I have discussed in the above section how several religious principles and cultural concepts were employed by a group of local people to change their previous perception and to justify their new practices. Interestingly, the same principles and cultural concepts were used by another group of villagers to justify their practices, though in some cases their interpretation did not seem to be in accordance with the Koran. This aspect became obvious to me whilst I was interviewing hotel managers.

One day I was interviewing a man who was in charge of the Beverages Department at a three-star hotel situated about 20 minutes' walk from my foster sister's house. He had taken on the job after retiring from the army. He had had a wide experience of serving VIPs when he was in the army and told me proudly that he had even served the Prime Minister. Despite serving various types of *arak*, he boasted that he had never been tempted to drink even a drop of it, which I found very hard to believe. He maintained, "It depends on your *iman*: if you have a strong *iman*, then you won't touch the drink." However, when I asked why he was serving *arak* and if he knew that it was wrong, he said to me, "What can I do?...this is my job. At least I don't drink." This statement puzzled me at the time because he used the same concept of *iman* to explain his efforts in refraining from drinking *arak* but at the same time he would serve *arak*, which seemed to contradict his own interpretation of *iman*. Syed's ambivalent attitude towards *arak* shows how a different interpretation could be used to uphold Islamic law and at the same time justify his own convenience. From Syed's point of view, his job, which entailed serving *arak* and in fact provided him with an income from a *haram* source, earning a living from the *haram* source was not as bad as actually consuming *arak*.

Another example of this contradiction is the story of Atan, a beach boy cum tourist guide, who was fluent in English. As a result, he was much in demand by foreign tourists. One of the main tasks of a tourist guide was to take the guests to discos and pubs for entertainment. Atan argued that he was confused by the government policy, which, he said, was such a hindrance to the development of local tourism. He was referring to the recent regulation, strictly enforced by the local authorities and state government, which stated that entertainment outlets could not open on Thursday night and declared Friday a 'Family Day.'¹⁷ The closing time for all discos and pubs had already been put back from 2 a.m. to 12 a.m. Several tourist operators and others connected with tourism were unhappy with this new regulation, for they argued that this would attract fewer tourists to the island. Atan objected to the regulation, saying that it would affect tourism since it would be difficult for him to entertain tourists, particularly foreign tourists. He said to me firmly, "...there is nowhere to go...no nightlife at all. Langkawi will become a very boring place for tourists. Langkawi will die." He argued that *arak* was important for the tourist industry because it had become one of the main elements in attracting more tourists to the island, particularly foreign tourists. His view was different from Syed. Atan admitted that he drank *arak* but argued that it was *only* for the purpose of entertaining his guests. He explained:

I drink just to accompany my guest [tourist]. It's fine as long as my main intention (*niat*) is just to entertain the guest. I don't feel nice in letting my guest drink alone.

For Atan, drinking *arak* was acceptable as long as one did not reach a stage of drunkenness. When I looked a little confused with his explanation, he defended his argument by saying, "Well, I'm just doing my job...to entertain my guests...to make them happy." However, Atan's views were criticised by another tourist guide, who said

¹⁷ Muslims consider Thursday night a good night to worship god and are therefore encouraged to take longer over their prayers at that time.

that there was no negotiation with something that had already been stated to be wrong.

He argued,

Drinking *arak* is forbidden, so there is no question of whether one or two sips are acceptable. We can tell them [the guests] that we cannot drink; they can understand...they can't force us if we cannot drink. It's not that they [the tourists] don't understand, we are the ones who want to drink...to entertain tourists is just an excuse to drink.

While I was interviewing Syed, one of his staff, a young man in his early twenties, walked past us and went into the next room. He then returned with three bottles of *arak* in his hands. He was smiling at us and appeared rather embarrassed when both of us stopped talking and looked at him. After my interview, the young man came up to me, and appeared guilty as he said to me:

I know that it is wrong to do this work [serve alcoholic drink], but what can I do? This is my work. It's not easy to find another job. I know it's wrong but at least I don't drink. In fact, you must have a 'strong *iman*' to refrain from drinking in this kind of working environment.

The above examples of Syed, Atan and the young man illustrate how the concept of *iman* was continually subjected to various interpretations. These were used in such a way so as to justify their practices, even though the practices seemed to contradict Islamic law.

I also observed the following scenario when I interviewed a local businessman, Jali, who owned a chalet and a restaurant in the village. During the interview, I noticed that Jali was trying to avoid answering my questions and started talking about the different opinions of the villagers regarding *arak*. I was quite surprised at the way in which he expressed his view of *arak*, which contrasted with that of the other villagers

whom I had interviewed. Jali argued that local entrepreneurs had been put in a dilemma. On the one hand the local government urged the Malays to play an active part in tourism so that Langkawi Island could compete with other tourist destinations such as Bali and Thailand. On the other hand the local government was claimed to be imposing many restrictions, which made such an aim impossible to achieve. Jali, who seemed to have been waiting for the right moment to express his opinions, insisted that whether local people liked it or not, *arak* was an important element in attracting tourists. In trying to convince me, he asserted that this argument was based on his own survey, in which he asked foreign tourists who had visited Thailand before coming to Langkawi Island to compare the two destinations. According to his survey, the tourists agreed that to make Langkawi attractive, the island must have an unrestricted environment, places where alcohol was available, where nightclubs and discos were not frowned upon. His voice rose as he declared that many foreign tourists had suggested to him that to be competitive, the local tourist industry should "provide women and *arak*." Jali said to me, "How can Langkawi compete with Bali and Thailand if it does not even have enough facilities to compete with those places?" Although he did admit that drinking *arak* was wrong, he thought that there should be some flexibility in selling it.

His argument seemed to contradict that of the other local businessmen whom I had met. Only at the end of the interview did I understand the reason for his opinion. Jali admitted to me that he used to sell *arak* in his restaurant because he knew that it could attract non-Muslim customers, but he had stopped selling it a few years ago. Curious, I asked him why. He told me that he had begun to feel guilty and realise his mistakes (*dah sedar*). I was quite puzzled by his explanation because he had known all along that he was not supposed to sell *arak*. However, I was told that it was because the villagers started complaining about his behaviour, not because of his becoming aware (*dah sedar*) of his guilt. His decision was influenced by his sense of *malu* at being accused by the

villagers of trying to make a profit unlawfully. There were several cases of villagers who neither sold nor drank *arak*, not so much because they did not want to, but because they were *malu* to be seen doing it in public. These people argued that to avoid being labelled 'shameless' (*tak ada malu*) one should not be seen drinking in public.

Sometimes, the warning of *pandai jaga diri*, which was given by some villagers to their children who worked in hotels, to guard against involvement in immoral activities, was used just for appearances' sake. The fact was that some of the villagers did not seem to mind that their children were asked to serve *arak*, as long as it was confined to the hotel area where the neighbours would not see it. There was one young girl, Asiah, who often visited my foster sister after work and with whom I became a close friend. When she told her mother that she wanted to work in a chalet restaurant owned by a German, she knew that it would entail the serving of *arak*. However, Asiah promised her mother that she would not be asked to do that. Therefore, her mother did not raise any objections. During one of my visits to Asiah's house, her mother said that there was nothing wrong with local women working in hotels or restaurant as long as they had no dealings with *arak*. She once said to me, "It's a bit too much if one has to serve *arak* just to get money." But it would be no problem if she knew how to 'take care of herself.' One day, Asiah admitted to me that she did serve *arak* at the chalet because there was a shortage of staff, and begged me not to tell her mother. However, eventually her mother found out from her neighbour. After hearing that, I was quite surprised that she did not even ask her daughter to leave her job. Instead, she defended Asiah, saying that she was forced to serve *arak* though Asiah vehemently denied it. I was puzzled because Asiah was working in a non-Muslim restaurant and therefore her mother knew that her daughter could not avoid serving *arak*. I wondered why she did not ask her daughter to leave her job. I found out later that it was because the wages were quite high and Asiah received numerous tips from customers.

Asiah's story shows how the concept of *pandai jaga diri* was sometimes employed purely as a form of words, which was not put into practice. It was the *malu* of being seen by their neighbours doing something that was against their beliefs rather than feeling guilty about their practices that forced some of the villagers to avoid serving, selling or drinking *arak*. I was also told that there were four villagers who had leased their land to non-Muslims. One of them was Osman, who had leased his one-acre of land to a German businessman for the period of twenty years. Osman would receive a fixed amount of money, RM 5000 per year for the land and RM1500 per month for the restaurant, which had already been agreed between him and the tenant. At the time of my fieldwork, the German businessman has been operating a chalet on the leased land for nearly ten years. His was the only chalet in the village that served Western food, and therefore, many of his customers were European tourists.

Realising that Osman's action seemed to contradict the argument of the other chalet operators, I asked for some clarification from Suffian, the local imam, whose house was just three minutes' walk from the German's chalet. He was quite reluctant to give his view but relented when I insisted on an explanation. Trying not to sound too personal, Suffian said that these people, ones who leased their land or restaurants to non-Muslims, were attracted only by material things to earn 'instant money' or to 'get rich quick' (*nak cepat kaya*). He explained to me,

What's the point of having a lot of money if it is from *haram* sources? If I wanted to get a lot of money, I'd have got it...but I won't do that because I'm a Muslim. When Islam says "no," don't do it. There's no tolerable level (*tolak ansur*). If they know it but still do it, then we cannot say anything...it's between them and God.

Although it would be interesting to know the view of the people concerned, being a Muslim myself made it difficult for me to ask such a question, since I knew that it would offend them. Taib notes how awkward it is to ask other people about their religious faith since the Malays are very sensitive about religion. "They feel hurt if they are not considered Muslim even though some of them do not perform their religious duties regularly" (1985: 22). The above discussion shows how the different interpretations were used to justify their practices, which seemed to be dependent on personal circumstances or economic interests. The same religious principles and cultural concepts were used, with ambiguous results.

Outsider and Insider

I have described above how local people argued that they should 'cope with their own *nafsu*' to adapt to the development of tourism. Instead of blaming tourists, the villagers expressed their apprehension about the influence of outsiders (*orang luar*), specifically young men and women, who came to Langkawi to work in hotels and shopping centres. It was asserted that they were the ones who had a strong influence on local young people because they were mixing with them for long periods at work. The local Religious Officer told me that of those involved in immoral activities, the proportion of outsiders to local people was 10 : 2.

Villagers' assertion of the involvement in immoral activities by young workers from outside Langkawi, which then influenced local young people, was related to the concept of *malu* and 'weak *iman*.' As the village's imam, Suffian encountered various problems with these young workers. Apparently they came to Langkawi unaccompanied by their parents, and lived with friends in the hostel or in rented houses. Apart from a

few individual efforts to make contact with the villagers, the outsiders mostly kept themselves separate from the local community. Suffian argued that the lack of connection with and protection of a village community resulted in these young people having less *malu* about indulging in immoral activities. Living in a hostel or rented house without their guardians or parents allowed them to have more freedom (*bebas*), expressed in a loosening of inhibitions that led them to flout village conventions and lose control over their sexuality.

Abd. Halim (1993) argues that the Malay sense of manners is closely linked to the family, and therefore any dishonour that one brought on oneself would also be extended to one's family. If one were going to do anything dishonourable, it should be outside one's community where the family is unknown, ensuring that anonymity is preserved. This view led these young workers to be perceived by the villagers as more 'social.' 'Social' is jargon often used by the villagers to refer to those who are loose, wild, and have more freedom. One local man argued that when living in the home village, local young people had *malu*, because their behaviour was inhibited by the sense of *malu* towards their fellow villagers. At least their fellow villagers knew their parents, and if the young people ever wanted to do anything shameful, they would not want to bring *malu* on their family. As Suffian said, "In this village everybody knows everybody. We can 'advise' our children, nephews, nieces and cousins, but we simply cannot do that to outsiders. Who are we? We're not their parents...we're not their relatives (*saudara*)."

I was interviewing a chalet operator in her reception office when she saw a young man who had just come out of a shop, opposite her chalet. She stared at the young man and then told me that he was buying *arak*. When I asked her how she knew, she said, "Because he put it in a black plastic bag so that no one would notice what's in

it...but he's an outsider working as a beach boy." She said that the young man knew that she knew but he could not care less because he was an outsider. She described how this man would buy a crate of alcoholic drink and hold a party on the beach at night with several local youths. The evidence was clear because there were numerous empty *arak* cans lying on the beach the next morning.

The fact that there was little contact between them meant that the villagers could not do much to 'advise' the *orang luar*, even though they were living in the same area. The villagers could only sometimes threaten to call the Religious Officer or the imam to scare those who were seen bringing members of the opposite sex into their homes. One evening, I was sitting with Cik Nor, a local villager, and her two children, Latif, 13 and Ella, 17, on the veranda of their house. As we were chatting, a young couple on a motorcycle was seen approaching the rented house next door. The rented house was occupied by a group of young men who were employed at the international hotel outside the village. During the evening, they would play loud music and several of their friends would come to amuse themselves until late at night. Sometimes, Cik Nor told me, the sound of laughter could be heard in the small hours. Latif had already complained to his mother that he had seen several young women entering the house. His mother told me about her son's dislike of their neighbours' behaviour. They never had any conversation with the young neighbours because they said, they were *orang luar* (outsider). So when Latif saw the couple, who, he told me, were 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend,' for he had seen them several times before, he shouted at them to scare them away: "I'll tell the imam...I'm gonna tell him." I was quite surprised at Latif's reaction for he seemed to be a very quiet person. I asked him to lower his voice but he continued regardless. The young man, who could hear him clearly, looked very angry, asked the girl to get back onto his bike and then they left. Latif, who seemed to be proud of his action in chasing away the couple, said to me, "It's easy. Just tell him the imam will come...they will be

scared and run away.” However, the imam told me that he could not do much either and could only intervene in a general way by keeping an eye on the behaviour of the local young men and women in the village.

From the discussion above, it seems that the villagers of Kg Senang were trying to show that their negotiation with local tourism was not so much about ‘coping with tourists’ (Boissevain 1996) but about the ‘coping with one’s own *nafsu*.’ They maintained that it all depended on one’s heart (*hati*) and *iman*: “If one has strong *iman*, one can cope with one’s own *nafsu* and it will restrain one from doing things that are not blessed by God.” However, it was observed that the negotiation by the villagers entailed not only the continual individual struggle against base instincts and satanic impulses (*godaan syaitan*) but also mechanisms of social control.

The Local Religious Department and Tourist Operators

There are several government agencies on Langkawi which have somewhat similar responsibilities and objectives in the local tourist industry but are administered separately. The Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), through its Tourism Unit, is responsible for organising various functions to attract tourists to the island. LADA, which is directly under the Ministry of Finance, has received promotional support from the Tourism Information Centre. There are also independent organisations such as the Langkawi Hotel Association and the Chalet Operators Association. Both of them are expected to work closely with the other agencies to achieve their objectives.

While the aim of the above agencies is to develop local tourism, the Religious Department (*Pejabat Agama*), a government body under the administration of Kedah state, is responsible for implementing Islamic law, that is the Shari’a. On Langkawi, the

Shari'a which is applicable only to Muslims, is based on the Kedah Shari'a Law Enactment. The Religious Department concentrates on *khalwat*, polygamy, marriage without consent and alcohol consumption. Clearly, the tourist agencies and the Religious Department have different policies with opposing objectives. The role of the Religious Department had become complicated when the enforcement of its regulations was seen by a few as a hindrance to the development of the local tourist industry.

The state government's new regulations were seen as its effort to retain what the Chief Minister of Kedah referred to as the "values and identity of the local Muslim community."¹⁸ The ruling stated that entertainment outlets must be closed on Thursday night and that Muslims were to be barred from entertainment outlets serving *arak*. The Chief Minister said that the strict regulations were necessary because many operators had ignored previous regulations and continued to admit Muslims and serve beverages banned by Islam. Since the ruling, several entertainment outlets serving alcohol had started barring Muslims from their premises and some of them even displayed a sign saying: "Muslims are not allowed to patronise this particular entertainment outlet." This ruling has received a mixed response from tourist operators. Several of them, as well as other people connected with tourism, expressed their unhappiness with the new regulations, arguing that this would discourage tourists from coming to the island. A few operators said that they had advised staff to inform Muslim customers of the ban but would not bar them from ordering *arak*.

Although these new regulations showed the government's efforts in upholding Islamic values, their enforcement on the ground by the local authorities, particularly the Religious Department, became very problematic. This was because doing so would create tension between the Religious Department and the tourist operators. The

¹⁸ *Berita Harian*, 4 July 1998.

Religious Officer, who had also become a Religious Inspector, would, with the help of police officers, search hotels, rest houses and even private houses if a tip-off were received from the public. Without trying to undermine the Religious Department, several tourist operators argued that the strict enforcement of Shari'a law might hinder the development of local tourism. This was particularly significant regarding the drinking and serving of *arak* and *khalwat*. One local Religious Officer told me that Kg Senang was one of the areas with the highest number of cases of drinking *arak* and *khalwat*.

According to Shari'a law (Section 25), a person can be accused of drinking alcohol if he or she is caught in the act by the enforcement officer and, if found guilty, can be fined up to RM 5000. Section 25(2) also states that "it is a crime for any person to make, sell, present, display for selling, keep or buy any alcoholic drink and, if found guilty, can be fined not up to RM 3000 and jailed for up to 2 years or both."

However, instead of the accused being brought to court, I was told, they were only being given advice (*dakwah*) by the Religious Officer. This was for two reasons: a person can be charged under the Shari'a law for drinking *arak* only if he or she is seen in the act of drinking *arak* and this is also witnessed by the Religious Officer. Therefore, it is difficult to charge someone who has not been seen in the act of drinking *arak* even though he/she was seen carrying several bottle of *arak* and it is known that he or she has been drinking it. Hence, although there were many cases of drinking *arak*, not many people had been charged. This was also owing to the shortage of staff in the Religious Department to enforce the rulings.

Besides the shortage of staff, the demands from the tourist operators have made it difficult for the Religious Department to perform its duties. For example, on receiving a complaint of *khalwat*, the Religious Officer told me that they have had to ask

permission from the hotel management before carrying out a raid, for the hotel management feared that it would disturb the privacy of their guests. In a meeting, held between the Religious Department and the Hotel Society, it was revealed that the Religious Department had to agree that a raid could be carried out only after a complaint had been received. It was also agreed that the raid would be limited only to the hotel room that was the subject of the complaint and not extended to every room in the hotel. This case showed that the Religious Department was expected to be more flexible to give local tourism 'a chance' to develop. The Religious Department viewed this as something that had been expected. The Officer told me that he realised that their main duty was to prevent activities that were inconsistent with Islamic regulations. However, in many cases they had to turn a blind eye (*tutup sebelah mata*) because too much interference would be perceived by the tourist operators as inconsiderate and a hindrance to the development of tourism. The Religious Officer argued that if they really implemented the Islamic regulations, many Muslim hotel employees could be charged with serving *arak*. However, as one tourist officer complained, "If every Muslim workers is to be caught for serving *arak* ...then who's going to work in hotels? So, they [the Religious Department] should be more tolerant." Under such circumstances, the Religious Department viewed its purpose as no more than just 'being there' (*janji ada*) and just for bureaucracy. As the religious officer told me: "We're just like a 'step child' (*anak tiri*); we're here because of the bureaucracy...we are always the ones who have to give tourism a chance to develop."

It was clear that though there were certain regulations prohibiting immoral activities, it had become too problematic to enforce them because their aims apparently opposed the interests of local tourism.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by describing how the people of Langkawi interpreted certain Islamic principles in various ways to justify their practices so as to take part in tourism development on the island. I should emphasise here that even though these different interpretations led to debate among Langkawi people, it is not quite true to say that it divided them into specific groups. It should be made clear here that the different interpretations and even practices were expressed individually rather than as a group. My primary concern has been to show how the people of Langkawi managed to negotiate their own values and change certain perceptions to enable them to participate in tourism.

The local discourse, which was created through negotiation, highlighted the importance of Islam in influencing local perceptions of tourism development. The upholding of certain standards by local people proved the existence and influence of a strong religious faith. Black (1996) shows how Roman Catholicism influenced the local values and judgements of the people in the village of Melleiha in coping with tourism development. On Langkawi, it was revealed that Islam which is integrated into the local culture, acted as source of moral guidance to the community and its role provided important clues to the way in which the tourism developed on the island. The varied interpretations of certain aspects of Islamic law led to different practices by different groups of people in the local community. The notions of 'pure Islamic,' 'less Islamic' and 'un-Islamic' were continually used and became debatable as tourism rapidly developed. What one 'should do' or 'should not do' is discussed by Woodward (1989) in terms of the discourse between 'normative piety'¹⁹ and the local interpretation of Islam

¹⁹ He defines "normative piety" as modes of behaviour whose rituals are based on the Quran and hadith.

in Java. Although the people of Langkawi realised that there would always be various arguments, interpretations and practices required to adjust themselves to tourism, this would not create resistance to tourists or tourism development. Instead, the contrast between touristic and Islamic values led the villagers to adjust themselves appropriately so that they could play an active part in tourism and at the same time maintain their Islamic values.

The negation of old perceptions and the reliance on 'faith' and *pandai jaga diri* opened the door to employment in tourism, particularly in hotels, without the same stigma of immorality as before. Kamal (1996) notes that the usage of these socio-religious and cultural concepts emphasised the acknowledgement and affirmation of fundamental Islamic tenets. The idiom of 'becoming knowledgeable,' was used to show that 'people of today' were more 'open-minded' (*fikiran terbuka*). The desire to work in hotels, which provided various job opportunities for the villagers, was clearly related to the desire to earn a stable income. In Chapter 6, I turn to the new consumption practices, which make having a stable income important.

Chapter 6

The Confrontation of Modernity: Becoming *moden* and New Patterns of Consumption

This chapter touches on the issue of modernity and the new patterns of consumption on Langkawi. I argue that the modernisation introduced by development, particularly tourism, has put people in Langkawi in the front line of modernity. This confrontation with modernity has created a new pattern of consumption in which islanders participate in new kinds of activities. The gradual arrival of *moden* products that were previously available only in urban areas, such as cars, mobile phones, beauty products, and latest fashions, has fuelled the desire of the local population to become *moden* by changing their pattern of consumption. Becoming *moden* on Langkawi requires what Schien (1999) calls 'performing modernity,' expressed by bodily display and the objectification of modern goods. Schien argues that being modern should be thought of not only as a "context in which people make their lives, nor only as a discursive regime that shapes subjectivity, but also as powerfully constituted and negotiated through performance which can be seen in myriad negotiations of cultural politics" (1999: 361).

In this chapter, I argue that the desire to be *moden* and the new pattern of consumption is expressed in the importance of having 'one's own money' (*duit sendiri*), particularly among local women. This new consumption pattern needs to be supported by stable sources of income and therefore having *duit sendiri* is the main vehicle in acquiring new commodities and images. Many local women told me, "You can have your own money if you work (*kalau kerja boleh pegang duit sendiri*).” This desire has been reflected by the increasing number of Langkawi islanders who are in waged employment, not only the younger people but also older women who previously had no paid employment. Having *duit sendiri* is not just about autonomy in managing money

but also spending money, particularly for one's own pleasure such as buying the latest beauty products or clothes. In this chapter, I suggest that this autonomy in spending and managing money portray a different kind of freedom. I discuss how the intensity of the desire to follow "new commodified patterns of sociality" (Mills 1997: 46), despite the inability to sustain those images owing to low wages, has often pushed some of the people in Langkawi into financial difficulties. I was told of many cases of Langkawi people who landed themselves in debt (*berhutang*) or were left penniless (*habis duit*). It is emphasised here that tourism development on Langkawi has indeed accentuated this impression of mass consumption. Local people argued that this phenomenon was due to three factors: the increase in wages; the availability of new products and images viewed by local people as 'sudden luxuries' (*kemewahan mendadak*); and the level of contact with outsiders which stimulated the islanders' desire to become modern. They seemed eager to show that they too could become as *moden* as the outsiders, the people from Kuala Lumpur (*orang Kuala Lumpur*) in particular, although in many cases they often distinguished themselves from outsiders.

Modernisation on Langkawi

It has always been the main objective of the Malaysian government to promote and strengthen national integration by reducing the wide disparities that exist between urban and rural areas. The government realised that economic development and modernisation on Langkawi, which was dominated by agriculture and fisheries, could be encouraged by the development of the tourism industry. Indeed, the new economic policy has stimulated the economic growth of Langkawi, which in turn has brought 'hyperreality' such as the supermarket, the duty-free shops that offer the various latest designs, fashion, brand-new cars, mobile phones and entertainment centres that were previously found only in the cities. The availability of this new 'hyperreality' has indeed increased

the accessibility of the Langkawi islanders to these products. Branded perfume, leather handbags and shoes can be easily obtained in the new shopping complexes, which were recently opened.

During one year of my fieldwork in 1998, two big shopping complexes were opened in town and nearly ten other small supermarkets. The modern building of the shopping complex has the atmosphere of a shopping complex in a big city. For example, the Funfair shopping complex, located about 5 minutes' walk from the main jetty, was opened. Similar to any other shopping complex in a big city, there are music shops; fast food restaurants such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, MacDonalds, Kenny Rogers Corner and Pizza Hut; and a range of perfumes from Elizabeth Arden to Christian Dior. In the town centre, one could not miss seeing the big Harley Davidson shop with the big Harley Davidson motorcycle parked outside. The shop sells everything from leather jackets and men's suits to jeans. The Harley Davidson motorcycle on display has attracted many local young men to come to the shop. In fact, several of them, one of whom I knew to be a chalet manager, were buying Virago motorcycles.¹ Sometimes, in the evening, three Virago motorcycles and a few sport cars were parked beside the road while the owners were seen playing *sepak takraw*.² The roar of the motorcycle was enough to attract the attention of local villagers.

Since the establishment of Langkawi as a duty-free port, several entertainment parks/recreation centres have been opened which provide a place especially for young local villagers to meet their friends after working hours. The new hi-tech air-conditioned cinema, which seemed to be the only cinema on Langkawi, opened with a

¹ One Virago motorcycle costs from RM 14,000 to RM17,000.

² *Sepak takraw* is one of the traditional Malay games. A rattan ball is used and the game played by three people in a team. It is quite similar to volleyball.

bowling green adjacent to it. Prior to my arrival, there was only one small cinema in the town centre, mostly showing Chinese movies, which had been closed down recently. During the weekend, especially during the showing of new movies, many motorcycles and cars were parked outside.

A number of concerts were held at Lang Square, one of the new tourist attractions on Langkawi. During the time of my fieldwork, a concert was organised by LADA (Langkawi Authority Development Association), offering performances by a top comedy group from Kuala Lumpur. It attracted many Langkawi people who came by motorcycle and car. This would have been impossible in earlier years, when Langkawi was said to have no entertainment to offer the younger generation. As one local boy told me, "Before there was nothing here; by night every place was closed and everybody just stayed at home. Now, there are a lot of places to go to, especially for young people...they only go back home late at night." The new pattern of consumption is significant because Langkawi previously had a standard of living lower than that of the other states in Malaysia. In the next section I shall discuss how *moden* is articulated by the people in Langkawi.

The Concept of *Moden* in Langkawi

The word 'modern' or *moden* is generally used by people on Langkawi in contrast to the 'traditional.' For example, a modern house (*rumah moden*) in contrast to a traditional house (*rumah tradisional*), or a modern *baju kurung* in contrast to a traditional *baju kurung*. Although the word *moden* is often used to express the contrast with traditional objects, the articulation 'to become *moden*' is rarely heard or used by local people. This is because 'to become *moden*' is expressed by their daily practices reflected by their appearance, their sense of style and the possession of *moden*

goods such as cars and mobile phones. To Langkawi people, being *moden* is to be stylish (*bergaya*), to be in fashion, or to put it simply, “to wear what outsider’s wear.” Being *moden* is also to compare oneself with others and in the context of Langkawi, these others are usually outsiders (*orang luar*), or specifically people from Kuala Lumpur (*orang Kuala Lumpur*). It is a common statement to hear local people say, “I want to wear/own what outsiders wear” (*macam orang luar pakai*) or to be more specific, “to wear what Kuala Lumpur people wear” (*macam orang Kuala Lumpur pakai*). The reference to Kuala Lumpur is because people from Kuala Lumpur are often portrayed as fashionable and stylish. As one young man told me, referring to Kuala Lumpur people,³ “They are fashionable, out-going, the girls are more extrovert and up-to-date since they have been more exposed to the latest fashion or design.” This expression was frequently used, particularly when a group of Langkawi people was trying to guess from which area a certain group of tourists came. The conjecture became easier, particularly when the tourists were a group of young people from the mainland.

The concept of being *moden* that is based on being fashionable rather than *moden* can be illustrated by the conversation of a group of five local women. They were busy choosing clothes, headscarves and blouses, bought by Zah, who had just returned from visiting friends in Kuala Lumpur. She had bought these goods in bulk to sell to her neighbours, friends and relatives. Zah was busy promoting her goods to her potential customers, emphasising the good quality of the materials and the high demand for them. One of the women, who was trying to tell the others that the clothes were currently in fashion, said, “This is what people today are wearing” (*ni la orang sekarang dok pakai*).

³ Sometimes women from Kuala Lumpur are also referred to as “KL women” (*perempuan KL*), which often has the derogative connotation of “loose woman.”

Orang sekarang (lit. “People of today”) refers not simply to people *today* but specifically to “people who are up-to-date with the latest fashion,” that is, younger people from outside Langkawi. However, to a certain extent *orang sekarang* has become more specific when it is used to refer to ‘people from Kuala Lumpur’ (*orang Kuala Lumpur* or *orang KL*). It is observed that *orang KL* are referred to as *orang sekarang*, based on the assumption that *orang KL* opt for the latest patterns and designs and therefore are often viewed as people who present the image of being *moden*. For instance, Zah, who was trying to show that her clothes were of the latest design, convincingly said, “You should buy this, this is what Kuala Lumpur people are wearing today...latest fashion” (*Kena beli ni, ni la orang Kuala Lumpur tengah pakai sekarang...fesyen terbaru*). By placing the emphasis on what people in Kuala Lumpur were currently wearing, she indicated that the outfit *was* the latest fashion. Rather than using the words “to look modern,” being *moden* here is expressed more in daily practice. Miller (1994: 254) acknowledges this difference: “Material culture and visual imagery may have an important role to play in cultural change which is missed when too great a reliance is placed upon verbal self-representation and legitimisation.”

Symbols of being *moden* can be portrayed by bodily displays of urban lifestyle or the possession of modern commodities. In Langkawi, long trousers and blouses have become a common outfit (particularly for leisure activities) and cars and mobile phones are new commodities that display an urban lifestyle. To look *moden* is also another way of symbolising one’s wealth, which is termed locally as “rich” (*kaya*) or “having a lot of money” (*banyak duit*). Since money is the main vehicle for possessing modern commodities and leading a *moden* lifestyle, becoming *moden* also represents the degree of affluence of the owner. This value is based on the assumption that it needs a certain amount of money not only to possess these objects but also to maintain them. Their ownership shows that the owner has more money than the people who do not have these

objects, although this is not necessarily always true. This is because people on Langkawi have a very loose concept of “rich.” A person can be called *kaya* simply from the possession or display of a modern commodity such as a car or a mobile phone.

Being *kaya* is also associated with running a business, no matter what type of business one is operating. For example, one refers to a particular person who has a chalet as “he owns a chalet” or “he has a business.” This is another way of saying that that person is *kaya*. Sometimes the possession or display of a new commodity in a particular way can lead others to conclude that that person is *kaya*. This assumption is based on display such as the type of car that one drives and the style of clothes that one wears. Remarks such as “he must be *kaya*...look at his car, the way he dresses, look at the watch he wears” are often heard when an outsider or tourist passes by a group of Langkawi people. This perception may explain why many of the local people, particularly the men, are trying to appropriate this new kind of consumption as an indication that they are also rich enough to own these new commodities.

Cars and Mobile Phones: Patterns of Consumption

In mass consumption, the construction of value by its objectification is inevitable. The objectification of a certain material culture not only may be seen from its purpose but the values it represents (Miller 1994). Here, I shall give an example of two new commodities: cars and mobile phones. These represent not only vehicles or a means of communication but also symbolise the idea of being *moden*. As I have mentioned earlier, the car and mobile phone represent the local concept of rich (*kaya*) on Langkawi. The possession of these two objects, which have become widely used, is often being associated with being *moden* because they become linked to images of an urban

lifestyle. This acquired value explains why these objects have become favourite items of mass consumption on Langkawi.

The significance of this consumption by local people was described by one Malay tourist from outside Langkawi who was having a vacation. He said, “Langkawi people today are getting richer...look...everybody has a mobile phone. They have become very stylish now.” On Langkawi, the number of car users was very small prior to its establishment as a duty-free port. Before the declaration, cars were scarcer and many local people used only motorcycles and bicycles as transport. At that time, the roads were really quiet. Today, the islanders have started to complain about traffic jams, especially during special occasions. One old man expressed his fear of the road traffic when he said, “Today I have to think twice about going to town, it’s pretty dangerous on the road.”

During the early stages of tourist development, many Langkawi people made a large amount of money by selling land. The increase in wealth among local people therefore increased the ability to own cars. Cars have become one of their main priorities apart from using the money for a house extension or going on the pilgrimage. I was told on many occasions that there were several local villagers who used the money from the sale of land to buy brand-new cars costing RM 30,000 - 60,000 in cash. The ability to own a car is based not only on the fact that local people are exempted from import duty but also that they pay only 50 per cent of road tax. Because Langkawi is a duty-free port, car prices are about 20 – 30 per cent less than on the mainland.⁴ Furthermore, many argue that it is convenient to have a car on Langkawi, especially for those who have

⁴ An outsider buying a car on Langkawi is required to use it for three years on the island before it can be brought to the mainland without being subject to import duty. If the car is brought over before the end of that period, then import duty has to be paid.

families, since it is quite far to travel from one place to another. Public transport is quite expensive and not very convenient for visiting relatives or for leisure activities.

On Langkawi, the car is seen not only as transport but also as a symbol of wealth and modernity. This is because these two items come to represent the urban lifestyle. On many occasions when I was introduced to a particular person who was assumed to be *kaya*, my informant would say: "He's such a rich man: he has a chalet and two cars." The possession of a car, particularly a brand-new car, strongly expresses the image of being *kaya*. It indicates that a person has money for it needs money to maintain a car. One has to pay between RM300 and RM600 per month. One cannot fail to see that the many brand-new cars parked in front of people's houses are on public display. This can indicate that one of the household members has money or at least that the owner must have a stable income by working as a government employee or in the private sector or is self-employed.

Many of the visitors to Langkawi commented on the standard of living of the local people. One man who had just arrived on the island remarked: "Langkawi people are rich today, look...almost everybody has a car and that is not a cheap car." One of my informants, an old man in his late sixties was very soft-spoken. The first time that I was introduced to him, he looked like any other ordinary local villager with his white cap (*kopiah*), sarong and white shirt. However, I was totally shocked when I was told that he was one of the islanders who had become millionaires (*jutawan*). He became a millionaire when he sold several acres of his land to the government for millions of *ringgits* during the early stages of tourism development. Since then he was simply called *jutawan* (millionaire) or *orang kaya baru* or OKB (*nouveau riche*). Today, he has a chain of supermarkets and tourism related-businesses such as a construction business

and he owns several Mercedes-Benz for himself and his two sons. When I asked him why he was called *jutawan*, he answered in his down-to-earth manner:

I don't know...perhaps when they [villagers] heard that I had sold my land for a million then I would instantly become a millionaire. But they'll never know that I've used the money in the business. So, I'm not a millionaire anymore.

Ten years ago, mobile phones were almost unheard of on Langkawi. In fact, telephone facilities seem to have been available only after the establishment of Langkawi as a duty-free port. Today, almost every household in Langkawi has its own telephone. Gradually, several international telecommunications shops such as Ericson have opened their branches in the town centre, offering a range of designs. Local business peoples, particularly taxi drivers and tourist operators, are among those often seen using mobile phones. It is true to say that the nature of certain jobs has required them to have mobile phones. However, today mobile phones are widely used and owned by the majority of Langkawi islanders, be they government officers, local businessmen, small business operators, chicken dealers or fishermen.

The significance of this new scenario is confirmed by the amazement shown by visitors. One young man from the capital of Kedah told me, "Langkawi is really different now. Langkawi people are using mobile phones even more than the people in my home town." He attributed this phenomenon to the increase in the wealth of local people and generalised them as being "rich." He noted: "Langkawi people today are already rich. Before, they were just fishermen but now they use mobile phones to call their middlemen or for a business transaction." The significance of the possession of mobile phones by people on Langkawi was indicated by one local fisherman who was using his mobile phone to discuss his business transaction with his middleman. This

performance of using mobile phones shows how they are used to symbolise the degree of affluence of the owner (see plate 20). The possession of a mobile phone makes a person seem *kaya*, since it is not cheap to own one. I was told that the line rental costs at least RM60 per month, and that does not include the call charges.

However, paradoxically, not one of the owners of mobile phones I met would agree that having a mobile phone is to look stylish. They in fact argued that rather than being stylish, having a mobile phone is more of a necessity (*keperluan*) and convenience (*mudah*), especially for contacting a particular person. This was the usual response. Bakar was in his early twenties. After several months working as a salesman at the telecommunications shop, he bought a new red car and a mobile phone (he told me that the phone was given to him free by his boss). When I asked him why he had to have a car and a mobile phone, the usual answer that I received from him was, "It's very convenient for going around" (*senang nak jalan-jalan*). He added, "It's easier to have a car, especially to bring my family to visit relatives" although his mother often complained to me that he was not always around when she wanted to visit her mother, whose house was just about half an hour from her house. More often than not, I was the one who had to take her, either by motorcycle or his car when he was not using it.

Ironically, this suggestion of having a lot of money is often denied by the owners, not so much because they really do *not* have a lot of money but only to avoid trying to be *berlagak*. *Berlagak* is an expression that is used by the people in Langkawi to describe a person who is trying to show off his or her wealth or image. This is particularly true of those who cannot afford to maintain that image. I discuss this aspect in a later section of this chapter. The denial of having a lot of money was therefore expected, for it has become a common response from local people not to accept direct praise (*pujian*). Therefore, rather than saying that they were trying to be *bergaya*,

'convenience' was the usual reason given for possessing those objects. I asked Rosli's mother what was the point of having a car if she could not even use it. She then said, "It [the car] is for his own use...to show it to his friends. When his friends have cars, he also wants to have one. Others have a mobile phone, so he also wants a mobile phone."

The above examples show how these two items, the car and the mobile phone are used to express individualism. Miller's study (1987: 237) discusses the relationship between the person and the vehicle. He argues that the car is not only a vehicle for transport but also a vehicle for expressing identity (ibid. 240). The ownership and public display of these "urban commodities" seem to be viewed as the symbol of modernity. Gell (1986) also argues that the consumed items are incorporated into the personal and social identity of the consumer.

This "cultural construction of urban modernity," to use Miller's words, has changed the lifestyle and fashions of people in Langkawi. The possession of urban commodities is often complemented by the elegant display of branded trousers, T-shirts and shoes. One's sense of dress is another way of showing one's modernity, for it is observed that being *moden* is also associated with style (*bergaya*). An example is the change in dress styles: most of the younger generation prefers to wear jeans, T-shirts or long blouses rather than the traditional *baju kurung*. This style of dress is becoming very common for casual activities such as shopping trips in town, going around with friends or for leisure activities. Local people have adopted the urban style as their everyday dress. Miller (1994) discusses the concept of style in his analysis of the mass consumption of clothing. He argues that men create highly competitive displays of elegance where the individualism emerges between the clothes and the wearer. People attempt to accumulate a range of elegant styles that are seen to express their characters. It is observed that whatever job they are doing, local people make a great effort to

display their sense of elegant dress. My foster brother was a case in point. Zul had a joint-venture business with his younger brother as chicken-dealers. The chickens to be imported from the mainland of Kedah. They were then transported from the jetty to the processing centre, from which they were later taken to the local market. Zul's younger brother was responsible for the first stage while Zul had to sell them at the local market. His normal routine was that early in the morning he would drive to his mother's house, which was about 10 minutes from his house, and park his brand-new car outside. He would then collect the dressed chickens from the processing centre with his lorry and take them to the local market. He would park his lorry outside the market place. Like the other sellers at the market, he would simply wear faded jeans, T-shirt and boots. He would start selling the chickens from 8 a.m. and by 2 p.m. they were normally all sold. He would then drive his lorry back to his mother's house. The first thing he usually did was to take a bath and then put on a clean, new pair of trousers, T-shirt, watch and perfume, the last he had already put in his car. With this new outfit, he was ready to drive his car to town either on official business or to do shopping. This description shows how people on Langkawi put their effort into having *moden* commodities as symbols of their financial ability to acquire the modern image, regardless of their occupation.⁵

Women: Dressing, Direct Selling and Beauty Products

I have argued that being *moden* is also about being 'up-to-date' or 'stylish.' Being *moden* among Langkawi women is more focused on the sense of dress, which depends largely on the style and fabric of the outfit. During my fieldwork, the fashions of the younger women were influenced and promoted by the arrival of group of students from

⁵ Stirrat (1989) argues that the competition in owning consumer durables in a Sinhalese village is not based on the utility of the goods but only on the social standing that could be claimed over those who did not own them (1989: 106).

outside Langkawi who were studying at the local private college.⁶ As Miller (1994: 223) argues, style is normally based upon competitive displays among a few peers and the expressive ability of this small group is important. The fashion of these younger women, who were mostly in their early twenties, included 'jeans' or trousers, long baggy shirts or T-shirts and colourful headscarves (see plate 16).

Langkawi women's preference for wearing a loose or baggy T-shirt or dress is mostly related to their values as Muslim women, which are also related to the concept of *aurat*⁷ and shame (*malu*). In Islamic societies, anthropologists have interpreted cultural insistence on modest female dress as part of the 'shame' syndrome (see Goddard 1987). Muslim women are expected to dress modestly by covering their *aurat*. As one local woman told me, she would be quite embarrassed to wear a close-fitting dress because it would reveal her figure (*malu nak pakai baju ketat, nampak bentuk tubuh*).

Ironically, a short-sleeved baggy T-shirt is more acceptable and more commonly worn than a close-fitting T-shirt, despite the fact that the former also exposes the *aurat*. The way in which the younger women wear the headscarf is also slightly different from that of older women, for it is worn without a scarf underneath (*anak tudung*). The headscarf covers the head and is then simply tucked under the chin and pinned together with a brooch or clip. The competition to be the first person to wear the latest fashion is stronger among the younger women, at least in their own circle of friends.

⁶ During one year of fieldwork, a few hotels were rumoured to have closed down owing to financial crisis and have been converted into private colleges. One hotel in the town has been converted into a private college called Kolej Legenda. Its range of courses has attracted younger people from everywhere outside Langkawi.

⁷ *Aurat* is an Arabic word referring to certain part of the bodies that should not be exposed. According to Islamic law, Muslim men and women have certain *aurat*. For Muslim men, their *aurat* is from waist down to the knees; the *aurat* of Muslim women is the whole body except the face and hands.

One of my informants, who became a close friend, always admired the T-shirt and jeans that I wore, in fact almost anything that I wore. She knew that my T-shirt was not very expensive but the fact that it was baggy and looked expensive (*nampak mahal*) made the T-shirt really desirable. She told me, "It looks nice (*cantik*), baggy, and it looks expensive." She tried to buy the same T-shirt at the local supermarket but found that the brand was not available on Langkawi. She then persuaded me to buy the same type of T-shirt for her on my next trip to Kuala Lumpur. After that, she started looking at my jeans. At that point, I knew she also wanted me to buy the same type of jeans in Kuala Lumpur.

The practice of *pesan beli*, that is, asking someone's help to buy something for him/her when that person is making a journey outside Langkawi, has become a common practice among local people. This is because there is a wider choice of fabrics and styles elsewhere and the items are much cheaper in comparison to Langkawi. During my fieldwork, I made several trips to Kuala Lumpur to do research at the university and the National Library and also to visit my sister. Every time I wanted to go to Kuala Lumpur, I normally told my neighbours and friends of my intention and they would make a list of items that they wanted me to buy for them. The most popular items requested were headscarves, prayer robes (*telekung*), T-shirts and *batik sutera* (silk *batik* was used for making the *baju kurung*).⁸

Wearing a T-shirt and the latest headscarf, which had been bought in Kuala Lumpur, I often received attention from the local villagers for having a 'colourful' and 'fashionable' headscarf. I was often asked by the local women, particularly the younger ones, "Is this the fashion today in Kuala Lumpur?" When I told them that it was the

⁸ *Baju kurung* is a traditional Malay dress since around 1700s (see Sandborg 1993). It is a loose blouse, which has long sleeves and reaches down to midway between the hips and knees. The skirt is very loose and made from a long cloth with foldings on one side.

latest design worn by people in Kuala Lumpur, another young woman started to ask me when I should make my next trip to Kuala Lumpur because they wanted me to buy the same type of headscarf for them. One of them even suggested that I should buy headscarves and other items in bulk so that I could 'do business' by selling them to the local villagers.

Zakiah, my neighbour, with whom I became close friends during my fieldwork, would make several trips to Kuala Lumpur every three months not only to visit her friend there but also to 'do business'. She was the kind of person who took every opportunity to make money. She often asked her sister, who was staying on the mainland, to buy the latest fashions in clothes (*kain*) and bring them to Langkawi whenever she visited my foster sister. On every trip to Kuala Lumpur, she would spend nearly RM1000 to buy silk *batik*, prayer robes (*telekung*) and headscarves (*tudung*). On reaching home, she would telephone her friends to inform them that she had a new collection of dresses and invited them to come and see if they were interested. The responses were almost immediate, for within half an hour one or two, friends would appear on motorcycles. The sooner they reached her house, the greater the opportunity of choosing the nicest dress. Payment was by instalment, the number of which would be agreed between Zakiah and her buyer. Payment could be made in two instalments (*dua kali bayar*) or three instalments (*tiga kali bayar*) etc. Those who did not want to run up a debt would pay the full amount. Some wanted more time to pay so that the monthly payments were smaller. Therefore, the method of payment was always flexible.

Zakiah made her profit from a 10-20 per cent mark-up on the original price of each garment. She would usually make the trip two months before *hari raya* (the Muslim festival at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan). The length of time would allow the local villagers who bought her silk *batik* to make *baju kurung* for the special

event. The demand for these new products such as leather shoes, handbags and clothes is particularly high when *hari raya* is approaching. In many cases, the women plan several months before *hari raya* so that they can finish paying the debt. Since I was very close to Zakiah, she would ask me to buy the same items for her to do 'business.' Sometimes I found that the demands of this *pesan beli* were too intense. It was not only that I had a very limited time in which to buy the items, but also that I had limited money, since some people only asked me to buy the items without giving me the money.

However, being treated as her foster daughter by Zakiah meant that it was very hard for me to refuse her requests. On one occasion I was asked to buy ten prayer robes in Kuala Lumpur and bring them back to Langkawi. Therefore, sometimes I simply did not tell anyone apart from my foster family of my next visit to Kuala Lumpur. I would inform them only after my return to Langkawi. This response was often followed by expressions of frustration for not informing them beforehand: "Why don't you tell me before? Why do you go back quietly without informing me? I want you to buy something for me." My foster sister, who understood my situation, tried to support me, saying, "She's busy... she doesn't even have the time to buy those things."

However, being up-to-date is not only about wearing jeans, trousers and blouses but also includes the fashionable *baju kurung* (modern *baju kurung*). *Baju kurung* with fancy colours and patterns is normally worn for formal functions such as wedding feasts or other local events. *Baju kurung*, particularly that made silk *batik*, is very popular as a formal dress and almost everybody has at least one *baju kurung* batik for special functions. It has been argued earlier that being stylish is an expression of being *moden*. Miller (1994: 219) argues, "clothing is a highly personalised and self-controlled expression of aesthetic ability. This aesthetic ability is referring to a search for particular combination to create the maximum effect" (ibid. 219). The *moden* style of *baju kurung*

is based on the combination of the colour and design of the blouse, long skirt and headscarf. The colour combination, particularly between the *baju kurung* and the headscarf, is very important for this portrays the individual sense of style.

A person who has the ability to choose the right combination of colour, material and pattern is often viewed as very stylish (*bergaya*). This ability varies from the person who has 'no sense of style' and the person who is 'stylish.' The headscarf is the indicator since the notion of its matching the outfit is central to the definition of style. Normally the headscarf colour should be based on the background colour of the outfit. It may be the same or lighter or darker than the basic colour of the dress. The lack of sense of style is often associated with the unmatched colours of the headscarf and the dress. As one woman noted, "She really has bad taste...her headscarf doesn't even match the blouse." This kind of comment was usually aimed at those who had 'no sense of style.' Brenner (1996) has discussed how Javanese women's adjustment to modernity is reflected by their wearing the veil and fashionable Islamic dress. However, Brenner argues that the main reason for wearing fashionable veils is not for fashion's sake but to retain one's own motivation to veil and also to attract others to wearing Islamic dress owing their increased "awareness" of Islam (1996: 682). Unlike Javanese women, the wearing of fashionable headscarves by Langkawi women and the mixing and matching is indicative of an effort to make the wearers stand out from their peers (cf. Gell 1986). It was not an indication of their increased awareness of Islam – despite the wearing of headscarves by local younger Malay Muslims - at least not as articulated by people in Langkawi.

I have discussed the new style of dress of the younger local people. Here, I also argue that on Langkawi, there has also been a gradual change in the style of dress among the older generation, many of whom opt for long black trousers (*seluar*) and a baggy

blouse. This is particularly noticeable in casual activities where there is less emphasis on formality. Black trousers have become the favourites because black harmonises with a blouse of any colour and also disguises the shape of the legs (*bentuk kaki*). However, there are also sets of trousers with blouses of various colours, which are sold in abundance in the town. The usual reasons given for this new style of dressing by the local women were informality and practicality. Rather than directly saying 'to be *moden*,' practicality (*senang*) or the formality of the occasion was often used to justify their choice of dress. When I asked why they liked wearing trousers, the common response I received was that it was easier (*mudah*), simple (*ringkas*) and very practical for doing housework (*senang nak buat kerja*) or for leisure activities (see plate 22). I have suggested earlier that being *moden* is expressed more by custom and performance than by articulation. It was very rare to hear someone who had put on a certain dress, saying, "I want to look *moden*." Remarks such as "this is what people today are wearing" or "this is what the KL people are wearing" can be taken as people's desire to be *moden*. However, this new style of dressing also contributes to the struggle between wanting to be 'up-to-date' and to look *moden* but at the same time wanting to maintain their morality and femininity as Malay Muslim women. It was observed that even though Langkawi islanders began to adopt a *moden* look, particularly in their dress, the sense of morality was often negotiated and maintained. I was also often caught in this negotiation. Although I had been brought up in a village, after spending almost half of my life in a city, I found the application of a sense of morality quite exhausting. In many cases, I insisted on wearing jeans and T-shirt, which my foster sister sometimes did not really approve of, although she would be flexible about certain functions and places.

One day my foster sister and I were invited to a formal function at the house of one of my informants. The Chief Minister and several government officers were to be among the guests, and I was asked by my informant to record the event with my video

camera. I decided to wear jeans and a T-shirt since I had to take photographs and make the video recording. However, my foster sister strongly disapproved of my decision. She argued that it would not be appropriate to wear jeans, for there would be numerous people especially men, and even the local Imam (religious leader) was going to attend. I took her advice and wore my *baju kebaya*,⁹ the only *baju kurung* that I had in my wardrobe (I had brought only two *baju kurung* for my fieldwork). Unfortunately, because I had gained weight, the dress was so close-fitting that my sister considered it “too sexy” for me to wear for that occasion. She then changed her mind and advised me to wear my jeans. She justified her decision by arguing: “It’s better to wear trousers for it will be easier for you to go around to do your recording.” At that ceremony, there were more than a hundred people from the village, and of the government officers that accompanied the Chief Minister, 60 per cent were men. I was the only woman wearing jeans. When we were driving back home after the ceremony, my foster sister, who had agreed with my choice of dress, jokingly said to me, “I was right when I asked you to wear jeans instead of that *baju kebaya*. Otherwise the men would’ve been looking at your body instead of listening to what the Minister was saying.” In this case, the morality of dress was negotiated according to place and circumstances.

I have argued here that the adoption of *moden* dress also requires the negotiation of a sense of morality. For the older generation, it is acceptable to wear *seluar* (trousers) as long as they do not reveal the shape of the body and it covers the *aurat*. It is argued here that negotiating the appropriateness of certain styles of dress also takes into account the type of activity and space. These two elements, is always the focus of discussion on this topic. *Seluar* is an acceptable outfit for local functions for women or recreational

⁹ This is another type of Malay female dress but slightly different from the traditional *baju kurung*, for the long skirt is quite tight over the hips. The blouse has long sleeves and buttons down the front. From under the bust the blouse is nipped in down to the waistline. In contrast to the *baju kurung*, the *kebaya* dress reveals the shape of the body.

activity that is considered informal. The justification of this outfit was emphasised by one local woman when she said: “This is all our own activity, only among ourselves, there’s nobody else.”

Space, the area where the activity takes place, also becomes an important element of the discussion. All women are expected to wear *baju kurung* for activities held at the mosque. However, flexibility was shown when several local women were seen wearing trousers and loose blouses to attend women’s meeting at a nursery, which was in the mosque compound. This example suggests that on Langkawi, discussion and flexibility are also part of the adoption of a new style of dress in which practicality and appropriateness are important. Local women’s desire to look *moden* is expressed not only by their dress sense but also by their preference for certain beauty products which encourage women to look slim, youthful and healthy. The increased interest in beauty products is attributed to the arrival of several ‘direct selling’ (*jualan langsung*) companies on Langkawi. Furthermore, the mixing with outsiders who have used some of these products and their own experience have increased the local women’s awareness of their health and beauty.

Direct selling (*jualan langsung*) is a marketing strategy in which the dealers sell products directly to the customers. A few direct selling companies have opened branches on Langkawi and the recruitment of local people, particularly Langkawi women, as dealers was very active during my fieldwork. As dealers, they receive certain benefits such as commission either as money or as free products. A person who is registered as a member can collect a commission for every product sold. Among the famous brands is Billion Dollar, which sells products from shampoo and moisturiser, to washing powder, washing-up liquid and bleach. Bio Gen is another brand that focuses mainly on health and skincare.

One young local woman told me that she became a member just for her own use (*sendiri pakai*). For example, one kind of Billion Dollar oil is very famous among the local women, who use it to flatten the stomach. However, it has become a multi-purpose product for it is also used for stomachache and headache owing to its cooling sensation. Therefore, *minyak* Billion Dollar has become a very popular item among women in the village. Yah, who had just become a member, told me that she could buy the item for RM 28, RM 7 cheaper than the original price. She calculated that if she could sell 4 items at the original price, she would receive one item free. Therefore, many of the local women have become members of Billion Dollar just to take advantage of its benefits. The head office of Billion Dollar is located in the town centre. Therefore, the members, who are mostly women, go to the meeting by either motorcycle or car. At one of the recruitment meetings that I attended, two men were giving a talk to about eight women, most of whom were from the village where I was staying. As I have mentioned earlier, the high demand for direct selling products is due to its method of payment, which is based on instalments (*bayar ansuran*). This is the most convenient and common method of purchase by Langkawi people.

As the next section will demonstrate, the desire to have this *moden* image needed a stable source of income to maintain it. This explains why having 'one's own money' is so desirable (*diingini*), particularly among young local people.

Waged Employment and Having "One's Own Money" (*Duit Sendiri*)

Langkawi women have always contributed to the household expenditure the small amounts of money earned by making and selling rice cakes and selling fruit and vegetables. The cash generated by these activities is only occasional and insufficient to

support the household (Carsten 1997: 154), for it depends on the product and its availability. I argue that waged employment was perceived by people on Langkawi not only as a second income for the household but also as the main vehicle in realising their desire to be *moden*. Hence, waged employment is sought after by local people despite criticism that they are occupying only the low-skilled job category. It has been argued that in tourism many employment opportunities for local people have been confined to unskilled, low-paid work such as kitchen staff and chambermaids (Levy and Lerch 1991; Rees and Fielder 1992). The same is true of Langkawi, where many local villagers are mostly employed in unskilled jobs. Carsten (1989) has noted the limitation of the ability of Langkawi women to earn cash income. Therefore, this new waged employment has been viewed particularly by the women, as an opportunity for them to earn stable cash income. The majority of local villagers to whom I talked argued that being employed and having “one’s own money” (*duit sendiri*) was more important than not having a stable source of income. This cash income would enable them to participate in mass consumption.

It is observed that the work preferences of local women differ according to age and marital status. Young unmarried girls prefer working in public areas or in jobs that require direct contact with tourists, whereas married women prefer to work in private areas such as the kitchen or the laundry, where there is less contact with guests or other workers. The majority of the workers in these areas are in their thirties and mid-forties. This preference is due not only to the suitability of the job, which is not much different from their domestic tasks but also to the fact that they do not feel at ease mixing with the younger workers.

Furthermore, they do not have to mix with many workers for there are only four to five people in their working area. Meanwhile, younger women and men in their twenties are working in public areas as receptionist, waitresses and bell boys. The

younger workers prefer to work in this area because they can meet many people and mix with other young workers. One young man in his early twenties told me, "I like this job...I can meet a lot of people and make many friends. Working in that area [the kitchen] is so boring: you just mix with the same people and most of them are married. So, your topics of interest are different."

The majority of local women in their mid forties work as gardeners and sweepers at the recreation centre or theme park. At one of the theme parks on Langkawi, a group of several local women, wearing hats and loose trousers were seen planting flowers and cutting grass under the hot sun. When asked to describe her work, one of the women said,

Of course it's hot but we're used to hot sun as we worked in paddy fields before. We don't mind...I enjoy it...we can talk a lot and don't get bored. It's better than staying at home and not getting any money.

It appears that they do not view their jobs as low skilled for they have been doing the same tasks in their daily lives. By using skills derived from traditional domestic labour, they have managed to earn money. Therefore, it is not so much the type of job that concerned them but the money that they could earn from it. It was also observed that they seemed to acknowledge their lack of skills, which restricted them to unskilled employment. This would explain why they are more ready to accept their work despite the fact that it is often perceived by outsiders or experts as low skilled. Therefore, in the case of Langkawi, I can agree with Kinnaird's (1994) argument that the transformation of employment from agriculture to manufacturing and the service industry is viewed positively (cf. Ong 1990).

A stable income gives the local people financial autonomy, which is needed to enable them to participate in the new consumer lifestyle and to sustain their *moden* image. By receiving a monthly wage, they can plan in advance what they want to buy for either the household or themselves. It has been acknowledged by Western scholars that women in Southeast Asia have 'high status,' for they are usually the ones who deal with money, control the family finances, and often become traders (Esterik 1982; Errington & Atkinson 1990). Studies of Malay women have also shown that they have autonomy in managing money (Banks 1983; Carsten 1997). On Langkawi for example, the men give their money to their wives to be managed and keep only a small amount as their 'coffee money' (*duit kopi*) (Carsten 1997: 154). Although this may still be widely practised, I argue that 'managing' money and 'using' money represent different kinds of autonomy.

Firstly, let me explain the different types of money as articulated by local women. Money that local women usually receive from their husbands for the household expenditure is called "kitchen money" (*duit belanja dapur*), whereas money that is earned from wages or by self-employment such as making pillowcases, is called 'one's own money' (*duit sendiri*). *Duit sendiri* refers to money derived solely from the women's effort without any assistance from their husbands. This may be different from money that is gained from the sale of their crops because this is still considered a shared income. Autonomy in managing money does not mean that the women can simply use the money for themselves. In fact, they have to plan carefully how the money should be spent. The main purpose of the 'kitchen money' is to spend it on the things that will benefit the whole family such as food, children's clothes and school expenditure. Although the women have every freedom to use the money in this way, they still have to seek permission from their husbands or inform their husbands if the money is to be spent in other ways such as buying clothes or direct selling beauty products. Thus, there is

always some kind of restriction in using this 'kitchen money'. Several local women told me that they felt that they *should* ask permission from their husbands or inform them since the decision might affect the kitchen money for that particular month. One local woman, who was not working, told me that she would "feel guilty in using the kitchen money for her own purposes" because the family's interests should be given priority over her own. However, the women do not feel the same way when using their 'own money' (*duit sendiri*) for they know that it is *their* money. By having their *duit sendiri*, women have autonomy not only in managing it but also over *how* they should spend it. The freedom in 'using' the money is what I refer to as a new kind of independence experienced by the Langkawi women.¹⁰ This 'independence' allow them to exercise greater control over the use of their earnings in a particular way.

The situation reflecting the difference between those women who are working and having *duit sendiri* and those who are not working is described below. One young woman summed up the difference as follows: "Of course, they can buy what they want...they have wages (*gaji*). I don't...just stay at home...they are lucky." Such remarks were often heard, especially when we were at a direct selling party. I asked one woman, "Don't you want to buy?" She replied, smiling at me, "Maybe later, I have to ask my husband first." This meant that they could not make immediate decisions because they had to inform their husbands first, though sometimes this was used by them as a 'polite' excuse for not buying the product. The awareness of the importance of having *duit sendiri* among local women today is shown by the advice given to their children. These women often try to instil in their children's minds the importance of having *duit sendiri* by emphasising the necessity of having a career. My foster mother was always telling me how lucky I was to have higher qualifications, which would

¹⁰ Kessler argues that Kelantanese women's individually acquired income should be seen as a "strategy to avoid subjugation by husbands and as the realisation of enforced independence" (Kessler 1977: 303-4).

enable me to secure a good career in the future and would guarantee me a stable source of income. She said, "You should be grateful...you'll get a good job...can have *duit sendiri*. It's easy to buy things." She often used me as a "model" for her children when emphasising the importance of their having an education: "Be like Hafizah...study hard...go and get higher education (*belajar tinggi*), find a job and get your own money. So, you don't have to ask your husband."

The preference of local women to work and earn *duit sendiri* rather than depending on their husband's income is becoming significant. Miller's work (1994) among Trinidadian women suggests that financial resource rather than relationships with men are the key to the level of purchase. It is argued that the demand by Trinidadian women for new clothes might be linked to the presence of a relationship or marriage in which the men are expected to provide the money. However, since the demand by single working women is equally strong, this suggests that it is not necessarily dependent on their husbands or other men. As I have described earlier, the arrival and accessibility of new products on Langkawi have increased the local women's desire to try them. The new beauty products, for example, have increased the women's awareness of enhancing their health and beauty. Therefore, having *duit sendiri* is seen as the best way to fulfil these desires. This explains why it is important to have one's own money, for it provides a means to fulfil one's aspirations of modernity. Norazit (1996), who has studied the importance of work and money among the Malays of Muar, argues:

Work and money have another social meaning in present-day society. They divide society into classes; those who work for a living and those for whom the former work. To those who work for a living, having money is being powerful, prestigious, capable of commanding respect, exercise authority and possessing privileged access to the world of commodities.

(Norazit 1996: 3).

It is observed that there is no objection from local men to local women working as long as the hours and the job are suitable. In fact, women are encouraged to work for this lessens the men's financial burden. As one man pointed out to me, "There is no problem at all as long as they can take care of themselves. What's wrong with that...if that can help the husband." However, I heard of a few cases where the husband did not allow his wife to work owing to jealousy that his wife might be mixing with younger men or because there would be nobody to look after the children.

It should be emphasised here that the wages earned by women are not solely for their own consumption but are also used for the running of the household. As wage earners, the contribution of women in terms of cash income to the housekeeping is more significant. This is not trying to imply that women have only recently contributed to the household. Previously, it was mostly men who earned cash income. Now, however, waged employment has enabled women also to become income earners in the household. This new situation scenario has strengthened the complementary domestic relationship between husband and wife. It has been long argued that gender relations in Southeast Asia are based on complementarity rather than difference in gender (Esterik 1982; Errington & Atkinson 1990). Carsten also emphasises the complementarity of Langkawi men and women in the paddy fields (Carsten 1997).

Today, this complementarity is also reflected when women become the breadwinners in households in which their husbands can no longer earn money owing to old age. This is particularly true among the older women who have to work to support the family. Liah is a case in point. Liah, who is 20 years younger than her husband had to find a job at the nearest hotel after her husband could no longer go to sea owing to old age. She became the breadwinner of her family for she had to support her husband and

her 16-year-old daughter who was mentally retarded. She told me how fortunate she was to be employed as a dishwasher at a hotel near her house for she was “not that young anymore.” Every evening, a hotel van would collect her around 5 o’clock and take her to the hotel and her daughter would take care of the house and her husband while she was working. Another local woman, Piah, had to find other sources of income and felt relieved when her relative, who was a chalet manager in the village, offered her a job as a waitress at the chalets’ restaurant. She told me that she could not fully depend on her husband’s income because she had three children who were still at school. As she said, “He couldn’t go to sea, I couldn’t work in the paddy field...so we have to find money somewhere else. It’s not really worth it working in paddy field whereas we can get wages every month working here.”

I met one woman who had to travel by boat every day from Tuba Island (about 45 minutes’ journey) to Langkawi Island, to work as a gardener in the theme park in the town centre. She would take the morning boat around 8.00 a.m. and worked from 9.00 a.m. until 5.30 p.m. She worked five days a week and was paid about RM 2.50 per hour. She had to spend nearly RM80 for the boat fees every month. When asked why she had to travel so far to work, she said “I’ve got no choice, I want to help my husband, there is no work there.” Therefore, seeking employment is not only to find *duit sendiri* but also to earn a living, especially for those whose main income from traditional work was no longer available. It can be said that the priority and aim of wage earning also depend on circumstances and are not solely to find ‘one’s own money.’

Modernity and Distinction

It is suggested here that becoming *moden* on Langkawi is manifested by comparison with outsiders, in this case with the *orang KL*. Therefore, rather than articulating the

word *moden* or “I want to become *moden*,” being *moden* for Langkawi people refer to their ability to consume the same products as *orang KL*. Lisa Rofel (1992), who has studied the modernisation of a Chinese factory site, argues that modernity operates like a diacritical marker, “a story that people tell themselves about themselves in relation to Others” (1992: 107) and describes these “Others” as Western. On Langkawi, “people look at themselves in relation to people in an urban centre,” Kuala Lumpur in particular is the point of reference as the centre of modernity. Modernity and its images are based more on local models than on those from the West. For example, the desire to buy a certain type of clothing is not because it is worn by westerners (*orang barat*) but by *orang Kuala Lumpur* though some of the clothing may have been made in and imported from Western countries.

These ways of practising ‘modernity’ that are distinct from and parallel to the Western model, have been called alternative modes of modernity (see Ong 1996; Schien 1999). This discourse concentrates on analysing the lives of those who are seen not to copy the Western model. Appadurai (1996) also emphasises that although people are leading increasingly similar, modern lifestyles, they can also imagine and even experience different lifestyles owing to the media and geographic mobility. Instead of a more dispersed and proactive cosmopolitan impulse, he asserts that people everywhere increasingly “seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (1996: 4). For example, the adoption of “veiling” by Javanese women in facing modernity in Indonesia as studied by Brenner (1996) shows how this process not only challenges the local traditions but also the Western model of modernity.

However, on Langkawi, the desire to be seen as ‘up-to-date’ as *orang KL*, does not imply that people in Langkawi want to become *orang KL*. It should be mentioned here that they still view themselves as Langkawi people, who are different from

outsiders (*orang luar*), and this is often manifested in their everyday conversation. I suggest that the increased demand for certain *moden* products have been promoted by the dress and bodily display of visitors to the island. This has created 'enthusiastic imitation' by local people provided that the new products are available to them.

Unaffordability: The Effects of New Patterns of Consumption

I have argued that having *duit sendiri* is the main vehicle for Langkawi people, especially the younger generation, to realise their aspirations to look *moden*. However, for some of them, particularly those on low incomes, the drive to buy new products, to go to new places and try new cosmetics is too difficult to maintain. The intensity of the desire to participate in "new commodified patterns of sociality" (Mills 1997: 46), despite the inability to sustain the image, has therefore often led these people into financial difficulties. I heard of many cases where local people fell into debt (*berhutang*), either to the bank or to other people, or were left penniless (*habis duit*). The latter were usually those who had made a huge amount of money from the sale of land and then spent it extravagantly without making any plans to save it.

In the evening, it became a routine for me to visit Timah, a local woman whose daughter was the teacher at the local nursery school, at her grocery shop in the village where I was staying. The grocery shop had just opened when I arrived in the village and its stock was still small. It was jointly owned by her eldest son, who also ran a chalet business, and her son-in-law, who was a driver at the hotel near the village. They decided to open a grocery shop after their application for a bank loan of nearly RM 100,000 was successful. On one of my visits, Timah, who had been asked by her son to manage the shop, expressed her aversion towards her son-in-law who used some of the bank loan he had just received to buy a car. He insisted on buying it even though his

salary as a hotel driver was exactly the same as the monthly payment for the car. We were sitting in the living room while her son-in-law was busy polishing his new car in front of the house. She confided to me that she pitied her daughter, who was working as a nursery teacher to pay for her husband's car. She became annoyed when she then discovered that her son-in-law wanted to marry another girl. Timah also said that the money from the business was not even enough to buy more stock for the shop, let alone pay the bank loan, which cost around RM 700 per month. She said that: "Women think that he's got a lot of money because he's got a car. That's why the women run after him, thinking that he has a lot of money."

Another example of maintaining the image of being *moden*, despite a lack of income, was Mek Yah's son. Mek Yah had three daughters and three sons who still lived with her. All of her children, except her eldest son, were still at school. Nora, a young woman aged 30, who came to Langkawi to work as an assistant accountant at a hotel, was renting a room at Mek Yah's house. She was paying RM90 for the monthly rental but most of the time she would spend more money on the family, especially for food. Since Nora had been staying with Mek Yah's family for three years and was also older than Mek Yah's children, she had been treated as the 'big sister' in the household. During my fieldwork I became her close friend. She often confided to me her sympathy for Mek Yah who had to depend totally on her husband to support her children. She also sometimes complained that Zul, Mek Yah's second son, had never contributed money to the family. At the time of my fieldwork, Zul was working as a sales assistant at one of the private companies in town. As his mother said, "How is he going to help if his salary is only enough for himself?" His salary of RM 1000 per month was not enough to pay the monthly instalment of RM 600 for the car. This did not include his mobile phone bill and entertainment. Obviously he could not afford to have a car but he insisted on buying it. He liked to drive it so fast that the whole neighbourhood would recognise the noise

when he came back late at night. When I asked why Zul still wanted to have a car and mobile phone if he knew he could not afford it, Nora replied, "To show that he could afford it." His neighbour also told me, "He's trying to show off and wants to tell everybody that he's got a car. But now all his money has been used to repair the car, which was sent twice to the garage. I even heard that his mother is paying the bill." At first, his mother was quite reluctant to tell me whether or not he contributed money to the family budget but then suddenly she said, "He even asked me for money to buy cigarettes. All his money has been spent on himself...meeting friends at the KFC restaurant."

I mentioned earlier that a person would be called *berlagak* (show-off) if he still insisted on maintaining the new image even though he knew he could not afford it. This situation is the result of the clash between the increase in affluence and the sudden arrival of 'luxuries' (*kemewahan*) on Langkawi. As one local man expressed it to me "They [the local people] can't control themselves because suddenly all these things [money and luxury] are in front of their eyes, which they have never experienced before."

The demand for participation in this mass consumption would lead people into debt just to fulfil their aspirations. Liah, the direct selling dealer told me that it was very difficult to do business when a few of her customers, especially the younger ones, did not pay the monthly instalments. One of them was her own cousin, Ida, who had bought a pair of shoes costing RM 120. They agreed that the debt should be paid in four monthly instalments, at RM 30 per month. However, Ida started to give excuses to Liah for not paying the debt when she quit her job as a hotel waitress. To find the money, Ida decided to open a burger stall in front of her house. Although she had been operating the burger stall for two months, she still could not afford to pay her debt. She told me that

she earned just RM 30 per day from selling the burgers and said that: "If I give the money to pay the debt, I don't have any money left." One day Liah, the dealer, came to her stall. I was there helping Ida when Liah asked her to pay the debt. As always, Ida gave the same excuse that she had no money at the moment to pay. Liah got very angry and told Ida, "You shouldn't have bought them [the shoes] if you knew that you couldn't afford to pay. Don't try to be *berlagak*. I'm not begging for your money, I just want my money." At that moment, Liah grabbed the small tin containing the day's taking. There was only RM 10 in it for we had just opened. Ida could do nothing except let Liah take the RM 10. Liah complained to me that she would be out of business if she had many customers like Ida. Therefore she had to be careful not to sell her products to younger customers who did not have a regular income.

The amount that the younger generation spend on this kind of consumption may explain why the economic return in the household from the children's employment is often unclear. Apart from that, the maintenance of the modern image may explain why many parents have "forced" their children, after they have left school, to find a job in order to be responsible for their own expenditure. When Liah went to Ida's mother to tell her about her daughter's debt, Ida's mother said to Liah, "Go and ask her...if she knows how to get in debt, she should know how to pay it herself. Let her find the money herself."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the new patterns of consumption by the people in Langkawi and their relevance to the importance of having *duit sendiri*. Rapid development has increased the intensity of commercialisation, which has forced local people to confront modernity by changing their consumption practices. I have also

discussed how the value of being *moden* is expressed by the objectification of material culture. On Langkawi, the possession of cars and mobile phones has been given a new significance as symbols of “having a lot of money” and being stylish (*bergaya*).

To some extent, Langkawi people are trying to indicate that they can afford to have a modern image that was previously only to be experienced in the city. It is also an attempt by them to change the perceptions of outsiders who previously had a derogatory stereotype of Langkawi people. The low standard of living of the local relative to that elsewhere had created stereotyped perceptions that Langkawi people were poor, *kolot* (old-fashioned) and *orang pulau* (islanders). The arrival of new products and images has gradually transformed the way of life and constructed new values of modernity by the objectification of modern “goods.” Rather than having to live in a city to have access to *moden* goods (see Ong 1990; Mills 1997), the association of local people with the outsiders who work on Langkawi has created this “enthusiastic imitation” by local people which in turn has led to this new pattern of consumption.

I also point out that being *moden* is displayed by self-representation, focusing on the possession of the type of shoes, jeans and designer shirts, and complemented by the type of car and mobile phone. This is described by Schein (1999) as the “performance of modernity.” However, “performance of modernity” on Langkawi does not necessarily mean a “package” of all of these objects. Having just one of them can also signify modernity. It should be mentioned here that owning land (*ada tanah*) can also symbolise wealth. However, it does not have much impact because it cannot be displayed by one’s appearance. Although people know that such-and-such person is *kaya* because he owns much land, that in itself has no association with modernity. So the concept of being *moden* on Langkawi is expressed more by bodily display, for it is more closely linked to personal identity and self-fulfilment.

However, the inability to fulfil their desire to become *moden* due to lack of money has led these people into financial difficulties. This situation is central to local attitudes towards the impact of tourism. Development, which has been so drastic on Langkawi, has resulted in an inability to cope with the sudden changes, particularly for those who have not been prepared for it and have been carried away by these 'sudden luxuries.' This is the basis of local people's scepticism about tourism development on Langkawi.

Chapter 7

Local Entrepreneurship and Women's Activities: Becoming Middle Class

In this chapter, I discuss the recent emergence of a new category of business-minded individuals on Langkawi and their far-reaching influence on the local community. I argue that the development of tourism and related industries, as well as the government and private sector, were responsible for the creation of this new group. It was mainly composed of local businessmen, including chalet managers, owners of small and medium-sized businesses, retail managers and administrative staff. The emergence of this group in the village that I studied increased the villagers' self-consciousness of their self-development in many ways. This can be attributed to their experience in business, frequent contact with outsiders and the fact that they had been studying and working outside Langkawi. They seemed to be more reflective, more aware of the importance of formal skills and education and were greatly concerned about the future generation.

Following the emergence of the business people was the re-establishment of a local woman organisation, Women's Institute (WI). The active participation of the women in various local activities has led to easier access to the latest information on health and education, and therefore increased awareness of their self-development. Their creativity and skill have been manifested in various competitions between WI members from different villages. The emergence of this group has created distinguishing tendencies, as in the ostentatious display of the latest products and the effort in establishing connections with 'people at the top' (*orang atas*). However, they still live in the same locality and are still seen to be trying to adhere to typical *kampung* values, such as 'not being arrogant' (*tak sombong*) and mixing (*campur orang*) with local villagers. Therefore, instead of total detachment from the local community, the new group is

apparently still playing an active part in it. This conflicts with the aim of making connections with the *orang atas*.

This chapter is divided into several parts. The first part deals with the historical development of local entrepreneurs on Langkawi. Since the chalet business has become the backbone of the Langkawi tourist industry, I have made it the focus of my discussion. I describe the origins of the local chalet managers and, in the second part, discuss their role in the local community and the re-establishment of the local branch of the Women's Institute (WI).

The third part discusses how these new business people can fit into the definition of 'middle class'. Are they the new 'middle class' on Langkawi? I argue that the growth of these local entrepreneurs has gradually created differences in income sources and therefore distinguishing tendencies. Although they are always trying to maintain their sameness by reiterating their identity: "we are village people" (*kita orang kampung*), "we are *orang Islam*," to a certain extent these expressions have been used rhetorically. In conclusion, this chapter suggests that these local entrepreneurs cannot be defined as truly middle class and may only be what Kahn calls a 'Not Quite There' group (Kahn 1996a). However, the emergence of this new group, which is still small in number, should not be taken lightly, particularly if we wish to avoid misrepresenting the effects of tourism development on Langkawi.

Business Entrepreneurship on Langkawi

The development of the tourism industry on Langkawi was clearly initiated by the federal government and received special attention from the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. Besides being lauded as a new tourist destination, Langkawi was also

predicted to become an economic centre in Asia owing to its inclusion in the Northern Growth Triangle Development Project (IMT-GT).¹ Its strategic location, between Sumatra and Southern Thailand, makes the island the most likely regional hub of the project. The various international events held on Langkawi have encouraged the participation in big project of many Malay entrepreneurs from outside the island (Sloane 1999). In the meantime, the development of tourism on Langkawi has witnessed the emergence of a group of local Malay entrepreneurs.

During the early stages of tourism, it was reported that several local people became 'instant millionaires' (*jutawan segera*) when they sold their land for millions of *ringgits*. Their sudden wealth made them widely known as *Orang Kaya Baru* ('instant rich' or OKB). Shamsul (1995a) has described the rise of a class of Malay OKBs from a rural area in 1960s. They were predominantly peasants, small traders and owners of cottage industries who benefited from the development projects made available to them by the rural development programme. On Langkawi the rise of a group of Malay OKBs was the result of land sales, the proceeds of which were then used as capital to start their businesses in local tourism. Those who already had small businesses used the money to expand and diversify their commercial activities. Nevertheless, there were some OKBs who did not necessarily have any connection with business.

There were various types of tourism-related businesses in which local people played a part, either directly or indirectly. A year after the declaration of Langkawi as a duty-free port in 1987, the grocery trade (*kedai runcit*) was owned by about 24.77 per cent of local people and 5.5 per cent of local people owned chalet management.² However, the fact that the chalet business was directly related to tourism made the

¹ Northern Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) is a newly proposed area for regional economic co-operation among three of the seven members of the ASEAN countries (Tenku Idris 1996).

² See Md. Pishal, 1990, p. 40.

emergence of a group of local chalet entrepreneurs more important than the current existence of other local businessmen on Langkawi.

During the early years of tourism, there were only about five rest houses, which were operated by Chinese and Indian incomers and were mainly located in Kuah town. It was only in early 1980 that a number of Malay entrepreneurs began to build chalets on the beaches away from the urban centre (Din 1988). The chalet business has been considered the backbone of the local tourism industry on the island. Chalets are particularly popular because they are cheaper than hotels and other tourist accommodation. They number about thirty, of which almost 70 per cent are run by local people. The local chalet managers have been viewed as the ‘*real*’ Langkawi entrepreneurs’ (*usahawan sebenar*), for the provision of accommodation is a direct product of the local tourist industry. These are the people who are known as ‘entrepreneurs,’ not just OKBs (*nouveaux riches*).

Chalet Business in Kg Senang

Previously, the development of chalets by Langkawi people was concentrated in two areas, Kg Senang and Kg Indah. However, when the chalets in Kg Indah were destroyed, as described in chapter two, their construction was continued in Kg Senang. There are sixteen chalets in that village and they have become the main tourist attraction for most of them are sited on prime beaches, away from the capital town of Kuah. They have been built side by side along the only main road, which links the village to Kuah town. The history of the development of the chalet business in Kg Senang began in the early 1980s.

In an attempt to describe the historical development of local Malay chalet operators on Langkawi, I shall turn to the story of Din, a local villager of Kg Senang. Din, in his mid-fifties, had just retired from army when he realised that business opportunities awaited him, for there was not enough accommodation for the increasing number of tourists coming to the village. Din was declared by local villagers and other local businessmen to be the 'first chalet operator' not only in Kg Senang but also on Langkawi, and he was often called the *real* local entrepreneur. He was among the most successful chalet operators on the island, which made him known to politicians and entrepreneurs elsewhere. Both villagers and people that I met from outside Langkawi viewed Din as a symbol of successful Malay chalet operators. He was often held up as a role model for the local younger generation who aspired to become business people.

After retiring from his service in the army, Din went back to his village and his old job - fishing - which he had often done as a pastime during his army days. He was also thinking of setting up a small business, as he always wanted to do, but had not yet decided on the type of business. One day in 1980, he decided to go in for beekeeping. With his own savings, he built an apiary for breeding honeybees. During this time, although most of the tourists were concentrated in Kuah town, several foreigners came to Din's village in search of a path to the beach just behind his house. Since there was only a small path, which was normally used by the local fishermen going out fishing, Din would give the tourists directions to the beach. Quite often, a tourist would come to his house, asking to rent a room. At this point, Din became aware of the high demand for rooms to accommodate the increasing number of tourists arriving in his village. His sympathy towards tourists who needed somewhere to stay led to his letting his apiary as tourist accommodation for several days. Din began to see that a business opportunity was awaiting him, although at that time no major plan had yet been announced by the government to develop tourism.

However, in 1981, he established his own chalet business by setting up a Tandy Beach motel near the beach, which has made him the first chalet operator in Kg. Senang and on Langkawi Island. At the beginning, he built only two chalets. During the first two years of his chalet operation, his business was rather slow owing to the lack of basic infrastructure, not only in his village but also on Langkawi. There was no electricity nor piped water and the only link between the village and Kuah town was a narrow red-gravel road which would become very muddy during rainy season. Tourists therefore used paraffin lamps (*lampu pelita ayam*) and water from the nearest well (*perigi*) for their daily washing. Since there were still not many food stalls in the village, Fatimah, Din's wife, had to prepare breakfast at home for the chalet guests and then bring it to the chalets every day. It was only in 1987, after the declaration of Langkawi as a duty-free port, that the local government began a massive project to improve the island's infrastructure to attract outside investors to boost its tourist industry. In that year, a new and bigger tarmac road was built to replace the old narrow red-gravel road. Owing to these improvements, there was an increase in the number of local villagers following in Din's footsteps.

Suffian, a 63-year-old local villager, became the imam in Kg Senang after retiring as a religious officer at the local Religious Department. His house was only about ten minutes' walk from Din's chalet. He started renting his rooms to hotel employees; mostly outsiders working at the international hotel which had just opened near his house. To provide accommodation, he extended his house by adding a number of rooms, of which he let five to the hotel employees. It was this experience which gave him the idea of setting up his own chalet business. In 1990, he built twelve chalet rooms, which cost him nearly RM 100,000. He told me that he had to apply for a bank loan for nearly RM60,000 and use his savings to meet the cost of their construction. Six years later, after the Din's chalet was built, Bakri, a young local man in his early thirties, built

his new chalet next door. Bakri was encouraged by his father to set up a chalet business on his father's ancestral land (*tanah pesaka*). Two years later, Shukur and his brother also opened their chalet business, which was located a few yards away from Bakri's chalet. Baharom followed a year later by building his own chalet next door to Bakri's chalet. It is suggested here that the success of the chalet businesses in Kg Senang can be attributed to the encouragement given by the established chalet operators. By 1996, there were sixteen chalets in Kg Senang, strung out along the beach. Out of these, fourteen are owned and run by the Malay villagers, while the other two are owned by outsiders.

It has been argued that the increased number of Malay entrepreneurs is due to the government's schemes and bank loans (Shamsul 1986; Ong 1987; Din 1988; Sloane 1999). This is indeed true of Langkawi. The incentive scheme offered by *MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat)* and bank loans have encouraged the islanders, particularly the villagers living near the beach, to set up a chalet business. The loan is awarded to the successful applicant in the form of housing units. To begin with, the successful applicant is given three chalet units. The chalet operators repay the loan in monthly instalments, the amount of which is agreed by both parties.

The ages of these local businessmen ranged from as young as 20 years old to 60 years old and could be divided into three categories: under 25; between 25 and 45; and between 45 and 60. In contrast to urban-based entrepreneurs (Sloane 1999) none of the local entrepreneurs in the third category had had a university or college education or had been professionally trained in business. In 1988, according to a survey by Md Pishal (1990), about 54.13 per cent of local entrepreneurs on Langkawi had attended primary school, 35.79 per cent secondary school, and 2.75 per cent an institution of higher education; 0.92 per cent had a technical qualification, whereas 6.42 per cent did not go to school at all. There are six types of certificates issued to students who pass the

respective examinations at various educational levels in Malaysia.³ However, these local chalet operators had received only a basic primary education. Several of them did not even have the opportunity to sit for the first examination certificate for they had been educated only to standard six.⁴

Two of the businessmen had previously been in the army, which was considered a highly paid job by the local community in the 1960s, before setting up in business when they retired. In fact, one of them told me that he had had to leave school when he finished standard six because he had to find a job to support not only himself but also his family. Poverty seemed to be the main reason that prevented these men from continuing their studies. Four of them were government employees including an ex-soldier, a schoolteacher who was now the acting president of the chalet operators, a religious officer (now the imam in the village and an assistant youth officer, while the rest were fishermen and farmers. However, the level of educational qualifications for the businessmen in the second category (25-45 years) was higher than that of the third category (45-60 years) for most of them had finished their secondary education in the fifth form⁵ and a few of them had managed to pursue their studies at technical school (*sekolah teknik*) outside Langkawi.

In Kg Senang, chalet operators can be divided into two categories: 'established chalet operators' and 'new chalet operators.' The difference is based on the length of

³ The certificates are the *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran* (SRP) (Lower Certificate of Education); *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) (Malaysian Certificate of Education); *Sijil Pelajaran Vokasional Malaysia* (SPVM) (Malaysian Certificate of Vocational Education); *Sijil Pelajaran Tinggi Malaysia* (STPM) (Malaysian Higher Education); diploma or certificate, and degree (Masters and Doctoral Degrees) (Malaysia 1995: 120).

⁴ Standard six is the last level of education in primary school.

⁵ This would mean that they have a Lower Certificate of Education (SRP) and Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), a certificate that would enable them to pursue studies at either universities or other institutions of higher learning.

time that they have been in business because this would influence the number of chalets, the facilities provided and therefore the income generated. 'Established chalet operators' are those who have been in the business for more than ten years, whereas many of them who have been in it for less than five years consider themselves 'new chalet operator' (*baru lagi*). These 'new chalet operators' always refer to the 'established chalet operators' as 'already successful' (*dah berjaya*), whereas they are 'still crawling' (*masih merangkak*) in the business. An 'established chalet operator,' such as Din, might own between 8 and 140 chalets rooms. Since Din can offer various facilities to visitors such as a conference or meeting room, sports facilities and a restaurant, he earns more income than the 'new chalet operators.' Those who have just set up their chalet business can provide only the rooms for visitors, the basic facility in the chalet business.

I found it quite difficult to determine the chalet operators' level of income owing to their reticence on the subject. The response that I usually received was either 'quite okay' (*adalah sikit-sikit*) or 'not too bad' (*bolehlah tahan*). On average, chalet operators own between 20 and 40 chalet rooms and an 'established chalet operator' like Din, would charge an average room rate of RM30 to RM70 per night. During my fieldwork, Din had an extension of chalet rooms still under construction. By calculation, the average income for 'established chalet operators' could reach more than RM 12,000 per month. One of the chalet operators told me that he could easily earn RM 10,000 per month. This level of income can be put in the category of 'high income households' as defined in the Seventh Malaysia Plan.⁶ 'Established chalet operators' obviously earn more income from the business for they can provide various facilities such as a restaurant, conference room, car, motorbike and bicycle rental service, island tours,

⁶ Based on the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996 - 2000), income levels can be divided into three categories, that is, low income households: those who earn less than RM1000 per month; Middle income households: those who earn between RM 1,000 and RM3000 per month; and high-income households: above RM 3000.

water sports. They already have a wide business network and their chalets are often recommended by previous customers. The fact that Ahmad, another chalet operator, offers a conference room, barbecue facilities, air-conditioned chalets and *surau* (prayer room) attracted many Muslim domestic tourists. His chalets were always fully booked during the peak season or during school holidays as many tourists, particularly domestic tourists brought their children on holiday.

A 'new chalet operator,' like Bakar, had a much lower income for he had been in the business for only three years and had to charge low prices to attract visitors. Bakar told me that his income was just enough to repay the bank loan and cover the maintenance of his eight chalets. He would have to wait until he could save his profit to expand his business. However, he said, local villagers did not recognise the difference between 'established chalet operators' and 'new chalet operators,' often assuming that both 'had a lot of money' (*banyak duit*) or were 'rich' (*kaya*).

Local Entrepreneurs: Their Influence in the Local Community

The emergence of these local businessmen was attributed to their previous skills and experience in various small-scale businesses prior to chalet management. I was to learn that there were similarities in their early business experiences before they graduated to 'bigger business.' Unlike their urban-based counterparts, these local entrepreneurs started in 'village business' (*busines kampung*). This would include the house-to-house selling of fish and prawns, the purchase and sale of cattle, the sale of vegetables, and small-scale contracting. Bakri, one of the chalet operators, told me he that he started his business by selling prawns around the village on his motorbike, with the prawns and fish packed in a large rear carrier. Another local businessman, Ismail, whom I was urged by my informants not to miss interviewing for he was known as the 'first millionaire on

Langkawi,' told me how he started in business by buying and selling cows from the local villagers. He was only in his early twenties when he realised his interest in commerce. He was the kind of person who always found opportunities of making money. His enterprise began when he bought a cow from one of the local villagers and then bred from it. Today, he has several chains of supermarkets, and all his children are in the business.

It was this kind of experience that gave these local businessmen the confidence to venture into bigger projects and they were quick to see the business opportunities when the government decided to develop tourism on Langkawi. These were the people who saw the need for tourist accommodation and at the same time took the opportunity to establish other local tourist businesses. They were the 'real' entrepreneurs who were always trying to find a new niche in the market (see Md. Pishal 1990).

The establishment of a business by parents encouraged their children and relatives to follow suit. For example, Suffian had five children. His eldest son was an ex-soldier and had taken over the management of Suffian's chalet. His second son was a teacher at the local school but at the same time had a house-letting business. His third son had just left his job and come back to Langkawi when his wife was offered a job as an accountant at the international hotel in the village. He then started his own business by opening a grocery shop in the village. Suffian also had several other businesses such as a launderette and restaurant, both of which were rented out to his relatives for he could not manage them himself. However, it should be mentioned here that not all the children of these local entrepreneurs went into business.

The establishment of local people in business encouraged other villagers to do likewise. These local entrepreneurs became the role models for the would-be young

entrepreneurs or ambitious young local people who were still having doubts about venturing into a new business owing to their lack of confidence, the result of few skills and little experience. The success of these local entrepreneurs, who were previously only fishermen, gave these youngsters the confidence to start in business themselves. They became the 'living proof' that local Malays on Langkawi could also be successful entrepreneurs if they had determination and self-discipline.

The experience of witnessing the transformation of these local entrepreneurs who were able to use their land for commercial activities encouraged one young villager to establish a chalet business. Bohari built his chalet in 1990. After finishing his SPVM (Malaysian Certificate of Vocational Education) in Alor Star, the capital of Kedah state, he came back to Langkawi and established various small businesses. For example, he became a prawn supplier by buying prawns from the fishermen and then selling them to several seafood restaurants on Langkawi. At that time, he was only 20 years old. He always knew that one day he would become a businessman but he never thought that it would be in chalet management. This was because the chalet business was very risky and required a huge amount of capital for its establishment. However, his cousin, a graduate from the local university, suggested the idea and gave him encouragement. He told Bohari that it would be such a waste if their ancestral land were left unattended. In fact, his grandfather had advised him to discuss with his siblings how to use the land to generate money. Trying to instil confidence in him, his cousin gave an example of the other chalet operators who had been proved to be successful, particularly the first few whose chalets were a few hundreds yard from Bohari's home. After thinking about it for a few months, Bohari applied for a loan from MARA. His application was successful and he was granted a loan to build three chalet units. Thus, he began his chalet business and started saving his profit not only to repay the loan but also to expand the business. Within a year, he had managed to build another four chalet rooms.

Another young entrepreneur, Ismail, 22 years old, had become a fisherman at the age of 10 when he joined his father. When he was 19 years old, he realised that he did not want to be a fisherman for the rest of his life. We were sitting in a restaurant when he pointed to a man who had just emerged from a new green car. He said:

Look at him...he was just a fisherman before...like us. But now he has a lot of money from his business. Before, I was quite scared to do business...very high risk. But now, many have done business and are successful. Look at those chalet operators...most of them were fishermen. A few of them now have now become millionaires.

He quoted a Malay proverb: "No one can change your future except yourself." He was determined to save money from fishing to buy a big boat for his new tourist-boat operator business.

The above description shows how new local entrepreneurs in the village became a point of reference. Din discussing the environmental factor in encouraging people in business, points out: "attitudes can change only if the individual is fully aware that the environment has changed and if the individual fully appreciates the meaning, especially the opportunities, brought by the changes" (1988: 11). He further argues that this was important, particularly in the presence of other individuals who were more aware and appreciative of such changes. Pishal (1990) argues that the business environment was one of the two aspects that encouraged the production of more entrepreneurs. Being surrounded by experienced entrepreneurs inspired the beginners to take risks in business. These people also gave them business contacts and advice on the types of suitable ventures, applications for loans and the official procedure of business registration. Previously, these aspects were declared to be the main factors that prevented Langkawi people from responding to business opportunities in local tourism (Md. Pishal 1990).

Employment and Its Social Implications

Over the course of my fieldwork, I came to learn that these new local entrepreneurs were categorised by local people in certain ways. Chalet operators and those who were considered successful businessmen were perceived as having a higher social status than government employees and those employed in other occupations. The word *bisnes* (often in English) was commonly used on Langkawi. Everybody was talking about setting up their own businesses or wanting to do business, in which case phrases such as 'having a business' (*ada bisnes*) or 'to do business' (*buat bisnes*) became everyday conversation in coffee shops or at local functions. The term *ada bisnes* often carried the implied meaning of 'being rich' or 'having a lot of money' (*banyak duit*). I often heard remarks such as "He looks simple, but don't you know that he has business."

Sometimes, when I was being introduced to a particular person, he or she would be described as someone who 'has a chalet' (*ada chalet*) or 'has a business.' In other words, they were trying to tell me that that particular person 'had a lot of money.' One day I was having lunch with one of my informants who worked at the Land Office, when a young man in his late twenties waved to him. My informant told me that the young man had his own business, and he had just signed a contract to distribute newspapers to hotels on Langkawi. As if he could read what was written on my face, he said to me, "Don't laugh...it might only be newspapers, but he's got a lot of money, you know."

Villagers distinguished the chalet operators as *pengusaha chalet* or 'businessmen' from other local entrepreneurs. This term was also used by them to indicate how *kaya* these local entrepreneurs were or their possible income. Several businessmen told me that they did receive 'a lot of money,' although at the same time much of it was used to manage their businesses. As they said: "There's a lot [of money] going out, there's also a lot coming in (*banyak keluar, banyak masuk*).

The association between the local chalet operators and their chalets, was so significant that they simply became known and called by the chalet or the objects of affluence that they owned such as the house, the car or even the car's registration number. For example, although Din's real name was Ahmad, he was simply called 'Din Tandy Beach.' Since the villagers sometimes did not know a person's real name, he or she would be described as the person who owned such-and-such chalet and a green car or sometimes a blue Pajero car.

The local entrepreneurs could be said to be the first group of people who began to display the new style of consumption, for their increased incomes provided them with greater purchasing power, enabling them to acquire more expensive household items and, in particular, new and expensive brands of cars. Two years after establishing his chalet business, Bohari bought himself a new Pajero, while Salleh bought a brand-new Mercedesz for himself and one for each of his two sons. This type of car costs between RM 60,000 and RM 80,000. At such a price, it can be afforded only by those whose earnings are well over RM 2000 per month, whereas those with a lower income can afford only a cheaper new car, a second-hand car or a motorcycle.

Shukur, another young chalet operator, proudly showed me his new Virago motorcycle which was parked beside his new car in front of his chalet. His neighbour, who was smiling at my admiration, said to me, "He has a chalet now...so he can buy a new car. Before this, he only had a motorbike. Now he can have a car, a motorcycle...and use a mobile phone. He also has a new brick-built house (*rumah batu*)."

The possession of these new objects often became the symbol of business success. Since not many villagers owned these objects, this group of successful businessmen acquired a conspicuously high social status in their eyes, compared with wage earners in government or private employment. My informants would often say

with a sense of pride that Langkawi managed to produce *real* entrepreneurs (*usahawan tempatan*), who, they asserted, could challenge entrepreneurs from outside Langkawi. These local entrepreneurs are now being exalted as the new local Malay entrepreneurs (*usahawan melayu*).

The categorisation of people by the villagers as *kerja sendiri* (self-employed) and *makan gaji* (wage earner), and the perception that local entrepreneurs were 'rich' and 'had a lot of money,' showed the beginnings of class distinction, which was manifest in various aspects of daily lives. To understand this, I shall explore the activities of the local Women's Institute, which provided a locus for this process. I shall also show how the activities were organised in connection with the local entrepreneurs when the latter offered their conference rooms, meeting-rooms or chalet area for WI activities.

The Women's Institute in Kg Senang

The Women's Institute (WI) is a formal association, which had been established in Kedah state in the early 1970s with the aim of upgrading the socio-economic status of Kedah women. As part of Kedah, Langkawi became the latest district to be registered as a new WI branch, which was led by the wife of the Langkawi Secretary of Parliament (MP) as the Chair of the Langkawi Women's Group. I was told that a WI branch had been established on Langkawi since the late 1970s but had become inactive owing to the lack of local leadership. Its re-establishment accelerated the sudden interest from local women in joining the group. It was Din who suggested to his wife, Fatimah, one day that the local WI branch should be reactivated so that the local women would have 'something useful to do' to fill their 'free-time.' Fatimah was also interested in the idea, and after she had discussed it with several of her friends in the village and informed the

Chair of the Langkawi Women's Group, the WI branch in Kg Senang was re-established in March 1996.

There were seven WI groups on Langkawi, each of which was led by a president and committee members. A new WI group could be formed based on either several villages or one village, as long as each group could muster more than ten members. Each group would select its own president and committee members. The WI group in Kg Senang was registered in the area of the Temong branch, which comprised local women from two neighbouring villages. At the time of my fieldwork, there were about eighty members in the group, ranging from 20 to 50 years old. Like any other formal organisation, the WI group had its own organisation charta. The Chair was the highest position in the WI groups on Langkawi.

There was nothing overtly exclusive about being a member of this WI group for there were no restrictions on membership. A new member had only had to pay an annual fee of RM5, an amount that was considered very small by the members. Several members told me that the fee was no more than a declaration (*syarat*) of official membership. Every local woman was encouraged to join regardless of age, marital status or source of income. The open membership was attributed to the basic policy of the WI group based on the concept of volunteer (*sukarela*). Therefore, the higher the number of members, the more strongly the group would function as a voluntary body. Indeed, the concept of "the more, the merrier" (*lagi ramai lagi seronok*) was reiterated by the WI president to attract new members, particularly during meetings, when members were urged to bring anyone whom they knew - friends, neighbours and relatives - to join the group.

Members could attend the meetings and take part in the activities organised by the WI group, although it was observed that there were no strict rules against bringing non-members' especially those who wanted to see how the activities were organised before deciding to join. My foster sister had taken part in several activities before she decided to become a member, also because she had been persuaded by her friend who had brought her to the WI. Therefore the difference between members and non-members was not a matter of qualification but of time or choice. Many of the local women who were non-members told me that they wanted to join but did not have the time because they had full-time jobs or they had to take care of their small children. However, a few others told me that they would like to take part in WI activities but they were not that keen to attend the meetings. Each WI group had its own agenda and activities. However, all the WI members from every branch on Langkawi would convene for the annual general meeting or any special event.

The selection of women as president or committee members from those whose husbands were chalet operators or businessmen was essential for the link would prove advantageous in the provision of facilities for the activities. For example, Fatimah was selected as the President of the WI group of the Temong Branch although the other three committee members (government employees) were more highly educated. They comprised a nursery teacher, who was the Secretary, and two primary-school teachers.

I was told that Fatimah had been selected because she was a respected figure in the local community and also because she was the wife of the first chalet operator on Langkawi. As the wife of a successful businessman and widely known in the village, she was expected to be able to offer guidance and provide free facilities for the WI activities organised by the group. I was also told that her husband's close connections with 'people of higher authority' (*orang atas*) would enable them to channel their demands or

obtain funds. One WI member explained to me why Fatimah was preferable as President: "She's got a chalet and she knows many important people...so it's easier to do a project or get money."

I first heard about the WI from other local women when collecting my younger foster sisters from school. After living in the village for several weeks, one of my main tasks was to ride my sister's motorbike to fetch her children from school at one o'clock every day. At the school compound, several local women, with whom I became very close friends, would sit together in the school car park to discuss their everyday lives while waiting for their children. Sometimes we would gather on the front veranda of one of my foster sister's close friends' house, Ton, who lived beside the school. Ton, who was one of the WI members, ran a food stall on her front veranda, which was filled with schoolchildren during the lunch hour. I would sometimes help her with selling the food while I was waiting for my younger foster sister.

It was during this routine meeting with other local women that Ton suggested that my foster sister and I should join the WI group. At first, my foster sister was quite reluctant for she feared that her husband would not permit it. Ton then told us that we could come and take part in the activities, and then decide later whether we were interested in becoming members. We did go there several times, and my foster sister discovered that there was much useful knowledge to be gained from the activities. She then told her husband of her intention and was surprised that he supported the idea. He in fact told my sister that that it was the best way to mix with the other neighbours, so that it would be easier to seek help when it was needed, especially for special occasions such as a wedding feast.

Any new information about the group's activities would be passed around during the routine meetings at school. Since most of the WI members had a telephone, it was not a problem for any urgent news such as timing of a meeting to be circulated. Meetings were held only when required, though more frequently if there were any special programme to be organised. During my fieldwork, I attended several meetings, and I was brought by Ton on the first occasion, for she promised to introduce me to the president. The meetings were normally held in the *Tabika* room, a kindergarten room which was located in the compound of the mosque of Kg Senang. When my foster sister and I arrived, there were several other local women arriving by car and motorcycle. Some of them had been sent by their husbands and brought several containers of food and drink prepared at home. All the members were encouraged to bring their own food (often referred to as 'potluck'), which they would eat together after the meeting. However, there was no restriction on what kind of food to bring.

About thirty women come to the meeting, aged between 30 and 55. I was the youngest and the only unmarried woman in the group. When I pointed this out to one of the members, she told me that many of the unmarried local women were working full-time, and therefore they did not have time to attend the meetings which were normally held at 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening. However, the younger women could be seen at the WI special functions and most of them were the daughters of WI members. Most of the women attending the meeting were the wives of chalet operators, restaurant owners and grocers.

The dress code and the procedure portrayed the informality of the meeting. Many of the women who were in their forties wore trousers and loose blouses, while the rest were wearing *baju kurung*. All the women sat on the floor mat to form a wide circle facing the president, while the secretary and her assistants sat next to the president. It was observed that most of these women brought their children or grandchildren, who

were between the ages of 6 and 8, and several of them even brought their babies. The children were playing around us, a mother was seen trying to hush her baby's crying, and in one corner another baby was soundly sleeping, all while the president was explaining the next agenda to be discussed.

Fatimah, the president, began the meeting with a brief reference to the matters that had been covered at the previous meeting. The discussion then focused on the next big event, the WI's annual general meeting, which was to be held in three weeks' time. This meeting would be attended by the Chairs of the WI of Kedah state and the WI of Langkawi. At the suggestion of one of the members, Fatimah, without hesitation, agreed to offer her conference room at her chalet for the venue of the meeting. This was an example where the role of a chalet operator's wife in the WI group was particularly important. Fatimah also agreed to provide the public address system and even the decoration of the conference room. She said that it would not be a problem for her husband to let several of his chalet rooms for use by WI members, especially those from outside the village, for praying and resting. Among the other items discussed was the collection of money for the members' recreation, such as a visit to Phuket Island and a visit to the Hydroponics ⁷ centre to learn the latest techniques for growing vegetables in their own gardens. Since they had first heard about hydroponics at the meeting, their interest in growing vegetables using this technique had increased. A few days after the meeting, I discovered that several of the WI members, including my foster sister, had bought hydroponics kits, which cost only RM9.99 each at the local shops. One of the women who used this technique told me that she no longer had to spend money on buying vegetables for her family. In fact, she sold some of the vegetables to the local shops.

⁷ Hydroponics is a system of growing plants without soil in water or sand to which chemical food is added.

During the meeting, one of the members also suggested inviting doctors to give talks on AIDS. As WI members, they were often encouraged to have a free diabetes test and Pap smear test at the nearest medical centre. I was told that the group had organised several talks on women's health, among which was one on 'Mothers During Pregnancy,' given by the local doctors, and 'Parents' Responsibilities' by an officer from the Religious Department. There were also talks on cervical and breast cancer.

After about two hours, the meeting ended and was followed by the consumption of the food brought by the members. Everybody was eager to have the main dish, the *pulut durian*, which was Fatimah's contribution. *Pulut durian* is a local dish, a steamed glutinous rice, eaten with a sweet sauce made from *durian*.⁸ The food was served on plates and everybody tried to find friends with whom to share it, which created several small groups in the room. 'Eating time' was also a time for gossiping and joking with one another, and always took longer than the meeting itself. After finishing the main dish, we then ate the local snack - mango with a special ketchup (*asam cichah*).⁹ This snack was very popular in the village and was usually eaten during leisure time with neighbours and friends.

The Role of the WI

This WI group was viewed by the members as a means of creating their own role in the community. One young local woman told me that by joining the WI, she could mix not only with local villagers but also with the important people such as politicians. My neighbour, Lili, who was from Thailand, had been married to a local man for nearly 13

⁸ Durian is known as the king of Malaysian fruit. It has a thick and thorny skin and strong-smelling pulpy flesh.

⁹ *Asam cichah* is normally made from prawn paste, ketchup, sugar and chillies.

years but had settled down in Kg Senang only a few years earlier. In order to mix with local villagers, she was encouraged by her husband to join the WI group. By joining this group, she told me, she could fill her time by gaining knowledge on women's health such as breast cancer and healthy eating. It is also observed that the WI group has been used by the members as a formal channel for seeking guidance or help, especially for finding sponsors for WI activities from either the local government or local agencies.

Previously, local women used to spend their time in the evening visiting neighbours at the *pangkin*¹⁰ in front of their houses (see Carsten 1997). Although the activity still existed, particularly among the older women, it was decreasing among the younger women. This was because during the day they would spend their time taking their children to and from school and would be too tired in the evening to visit neighbours and friends. Instead of just going to visit friends, they would normally telephone the person whom they wanted to visit to ensure that she was at home or not busy. It was normal for the local villagers to say, "ring me first before you come" (*telefon dulu sebelum datang*). Since many local women were fully occupied with their children every day, the WI activities became the convenient place to meet friends and neighbours and hear the latest news.

The women's topics of discussion had thus been widened from their children or their everyday chores to the problem of how to deal with an AIDS patient. I remember I was having tea with several WI members at a meeting one evening when one woman told a story about a man who had died of AIDS. It was a story that has been going around for a while about a man who was supposed to have died of AIDS. The woman said that the people who were preparing the body for burial did not want to touch it

¹⁰ *Pangkin* is a wooden sleeping platform built under a house and often found in village area. It is a place to entertain visitors or neighbours during the evening time.

because they were scared of being infected by the disease. In order to “kill” the germs, one of the men suggested using bleach to “clean” the body. Listening to this story, one of the local women who was sitting beside me interrupted angrily, “Why are they so stupid? AIDS cannot be contracted by only touching the person...this is the problem if one is so ignorant.” I asked her where she obtained the information. She then said, “We’re lucky to attend this kind of talk [AIDS talk] in the WI, so at least we know what AIDS is.”

Friendship, Support Networks and Business Networks

I argue that the WI group is also viewed by members as a channel of ‘escapism’ from the boredom of domestic chores and has also become a means of establishing close friendships and support networks. One member told me that she joined the WI group simply as a release from the boredom of domestic chores and childcare. Siti, who was a new WI member, having joined only a month earlier, told me, “I enjoy it...so I am not just wasting my time at home doing nothing...it’s really boring. Since joining the WI, I have made more friends and I share problems with the other members. Sometimes it’s not finished there...we keep phoning one another.” It is suggested here that the various activities that they organised eventually strengthened the friendships between members. This gave them a platform where they could share their problems. One woman, who had discovered that her husband had married a second wife, lamented his neglect. She said:

Sometimes I had ‘tension’ [English word is used] at home, thinking about my husband, so I feel relieved when I join in the activities and can talk about this to my friends. They know about my problems. I have cried a lot with them.

The WI activities had thus become a means for its members to create special bonds with one another and establish their own support network. This bond was essential, for these were the people to whom they would turn to discuss problems or seek help.

It was also observed that the WI group was used as an 'arena' for new young, small-scale businesswomen to show their business skills and sell their products. Such business aspirations had been developed from contact with other new businesswomen who were also WI members. Promotion of products at WI meetings was one way to establish a business network because the members were a potential market. An aspiring businesswoman would normally use the 'eating time,' after the meeting, for this purpose. Two months before the meeting I have described Midah, a young woman, had become a dealer for Billion Products, one of the direct-selling companies on Langkawi. She told me that she could keep the commission from the sales until there was enough for her to buy her own crockery (*barang dapur*). She already had her eye on a set of plates in one of the shops in town and would use the 'eating time' to sell more of her products. After the dessert had been finished, Midah took out several samples of her products and laid them out in front of the WI members. She started explaining the benefits of belonging to the club. Some of them seemed interested in becoming members knowing that they could earn extra money, and furthermore, it was not difficult to find customers.

This activity helped the local women to gain financial independence. Some of them realised that they could not rely too much on their husband's income, therefore direct selling could lessen the economic burden of their family. This encouraged a few other WI members not only to take up direct selling but also to open their own food stalls (*warung makan*). Two WI members opened food stalls built on the front verandas of their houses. They sold homemade noodles, fried rice, drinks, snacks, sweets and cakes (see plate 24).

Siti used to help her close friend, whom she considered her foster sister (*kakak angkat*). After gaining sufficient skill and experience from her *kakak angkat*, Siti then decided to open her own food stall on her veranda. She knew that there would be no problem in finding customers, for many of her neighbours were young hotel employees who lived near her house. She would normally open her food stall after she sending her daughter to school, and close it for a while during the lunch hour to collect her daughter from school. When her business became established, her friend, another WI member, made several cakes at home and then put them for sale on Siti's food stall. Siti would receive a commission on every cake that was sold.

The WI group not only served its own members but was also a voluntary body that helped many local functions. The WI concept of 'volunteer' was not greatly different from *berderau*,¹¹ which had been widely applied to working in the paddy fields.¹² WI activities were also based on *gotong royong* (communal labour), which emphasises the sense of responsibility and reciprocal obligation among individuals to work as a group in the community. *Gotong royong* and *berderau* are co-operative arrangements to increase labour resources to perform heavy tasks, and the work is measured not in money but in energy (Aziz 1994: 28). This kind of co-operation is particularly apparent at a wedding ceremony, a religious ceremony in the mosque, a funeral or in providing a service for the local community. *Gotong royong* and *berderau* are mostly found in areas where a subsistence economy is practised, and since most of

¹¹ *Derau* is a system of labour exchange among a group of participants with roughly equal landholdings that does not involve any cash transaction. Members of different households work on each other's fields on a reciprocal basis.

¹² It should be mentioned here that planting paddy in Langkawi today is only a sideline since many of the local people have given up this activity for a more permanent income. This is particularly true of small-scale owner-operators those who have less land and whose the profit margin is very small.

the villagers are related to one another, the extra labour is not difficult to obtain (ibid. 130). In fact, *gotong royong* is very popular in Malay society and has become one of the elements of the national policy enforced by the government to create a co-operative society (*masyarakat tolong menolong*) (see also Bowen 1993).

Berderau was previously practised during the paddy harvest (see Carsten 1997). One of my informants, Abu, recalled the days when he and his friends eagerly awaited the *berderau* time for it was an opportunity for them to come together to help one another in the paddy fields and also enjoy a gossip. He still remembered the time when he had to work until 3 o'clock in the morning, and sometimes he and his fellow villagers had to spend the night in the *dangau* (bamboo hut) in the paddy field. Since this work was reciprocal, they would return the help based on the area of land that they had worked or the number of days that they had spent working in the paddy field. After 20 years, Abu still missed the *berderau* time.

However, *berderau* was practised less and less in the village as new technology replaced communal labour. This was due not only to the difficulty in finding people to take part in *berderau*, for many of them were employed full-time, but also to fewer villagers planting paddy. Nevertheless, the concept of co-operation was adapted and practised in WI activities by means of *gotong royong*. Unlike *berderau*, however, *gotong royong* does not have a strict reciprocal basis. During my fieldwork, I took part in *gotong-royong* to clean one of the beaches which was quite far from the village. There were about twenty WI members and their children from Kg Senang and many other women from all the branches of the WI on the island. I was asked to drive them in the car of one of the members' car, while Asiah drove a van and the WI president a Pajero. With these three vehicles full of women and children, we then headed for the *Tengku* beach, which was about 30 minutes' drive from the village. The fact that they

themselves had arranged the programme and were even driving the vehicles created a sense of achievement among them. One of the local women in the car jokingly said to me, "Look at us, three cars...all women...that's not bad." When we arrived, a group of WI members from another village had already started cleaning the area. Our group was joining in the work when the *Datin*,¹³ the WI president of Langkawi, arrived with the WI members from the Kuah area. She was wearing a tracksuit and a cap and seemed to be very friendly with the other WI members. She tried to enliven the atmosphere by joking with them and praising their hard work. The clearing up was eventually finished after two hours and everybody started to prepare the lunch. Each WI group had brought its own food and shared it with the groups from the other branches. It was during this time that the interaction between WI members from different villages began to grow more active and lively. It was observed that this practice of *gotong-royong* organised by the WI group strengthened relationships not only between local women from the same village but also between them and women from other villages.

A WI group can be seen as an organised form of *gotong royong*, which emphasises the obligation of reciprocity among its members. As a group, the members had a strong sense of obligation particularly when they were invited to certain functions. The invitation was issued to them not as individuals in the community but as a group of WI members.

I have described above how local women played an active part in the community as a result of their membership of the WI group. The various programmes enabled them to gain knowledge, express their skills and contribute their energy as a formal group. This new role as 'assistant' in local activities seemed to be acknowledged by the

¹³ *Datin* is a title for the wife whose husband has been awarded the honorary title of *Datuk*, for having served his country.

community. As a voluntary group, WI members were often invited to assist the organisers of special functions on Langkawi, government ministers or the royal family. The fact that such a role enabled WI members to meet VIPs endowed them with a new status. A month before I arrived in the village, the WI group of Kg Senang had been given the task of preparing refreshments for the VIPs, including the prime minister at the opening ceremony of a new hotel. Two of the WI members who had taken part in the preparations told me how delighted they had been to be invited to such a big occasion. They felt honoured that the invitation was not only to serve the VIPs and meet them but also that it was a kind of recognition of their role as a WI group. As one of the women excitedly told me, "It was not that easy to meet the PM (Prime Minister)...what's more, we'd been invited." So when I asked them whether they had met the PM, the other woman interrupted, "Of course, I even shook his hand...I didn't want to miss the opportunity".

Besides assisting at local functions, the WI group also provided entertainment when it was invited to perform *burdah* at a wedding feast. *Burdah*¹⁴ is a local term for an Arabic song praising Prophet Muhammad and is usually sung by a group. *Burdah* became one of WI activities for the members would gather once a week at a member's house and practise the words and melody for about two hours. Recently, the *Burdah* had been included in the annual competition between WI groups from different areas or villages. Since then, the WI group was invited not only to assist local functions but also as guests to perform the *burdah* at wedding feasts.

¹⁴ *Burdah* is quite similar to *Marhaban*, a song of welcome that also praises the Prophet Muhammad and is normally performed at the celebration of the Prophet's birthday or at the celebration of the birth of a new baby. The difference is that the *Burdah* has different words and melody.

One day I was asked by Fatimah to join the WI group to perform the *burdah* at the wedding of one of the WI members' daughter. She wanted me to photograph them during the performance. So, on the wedding day, twenty WI members were gathered in the living room of the bride's house while the bride was prepared by the *mak andam*.¹⁵ We were given a microphone connected to the big public address system installed outside the house, where all the guests could hear our performance. So, while the men and the other women were busy preparing the wedding feast and the wedding guests were enjoying the food under the awning in front of the house, they were entertained by our *burdah* song, led by an *ustazah* (religious teacher). The *burdah* took nearly 40 minutes to perform. Afterwards, we were invited to have the *nasi minyak* (a special meal usually served at a wedding feast), and as a gift from the host, each of us was given a *telur pengantin* (bridal egg), packed in a small decorative container made of coloured paper.

Difference and Distinction

It is suggested here that the WI group brought together local women from different economic backgrounds, be they doctors' wives, teachers, chalet operators' wives, hotel employees, government employees or the unemployed. These women referred to themselves as a group – WI members – instead of as individuals. The WI members could distinguish themselves as a group by the wearing of uniform at official functions such as a general meeting or on official trips organised by the group. The uniform of the WI group was a blue silk *batik* traditional dress (*baju kurung batik*), which was worn with a white headscarf. Members were not obliged but encouraged to wear the uniform, especially senior members. This was noticeable at the general meeting, which was held

¹⁵ *Mak Andam* is the bride's dresser or beautician. She attends the bride from the beginning to the end of the wedding feast.

in the conference room at Fatimah's chalet. It could be argued that the emphasis on wearing uniform was an effort to create a sense of difference between members and non-members.

The general meeting, which was to select a new president and committee members, was attended by the WI Chair of Kedah state, the WI Chair of Langkawi District, and also WI members from every branch on Langkawi. The meeting began with a speech by the Langkawi WI Chair, who praised the efforts of the local women in organising activities. Fatimah was very proud when her WI group was declared the most active WI group, based on their activities. In conjunction with the general meeting, a *gubahan* competition was held to attract WI members to test their creative skills.

Gubahan is the art of arranging and decorating to transform items such as clothes and towels into other objects such as birds, houses etc. The result depends greatly on the skill and creativity of the artist. *Gubahan* is used to decorate wedding gifts before they are to be exchanged between the bride and groom at the wedding ceremony.¹⁶ However, the art of *gubahan* (*seni gubahan*) had become one of the WI activities, which gave members the opportunity to express their skill and creativity, in a *gubahan* competition. During the general meeting, all the *gubahan* items were on public display under the awning outside the building. During the meeting, the winner of the *gubahan* competition was announced. It was observed that the competition had created a sense of rivalry among members from different branches. The participants expressed their excitement and told me how their creativity has been recognised as a result of the competition

¹⁶ In Malay ritual marriage, the exchange of gifts is usually take place during the 'betrothal party' (*meminang*) or engagement day or during the '*akad nikah*,' the official legalisation of the marriage officiated by the *Kadi* (registrar of the marriages) (see Rudie 1993). Today to hire professional for *gubahan* would cost about RM 300 for 10-15 *gubahan* items.

I have argued earlier that the re-establishment of the WI group in Kg Senang was due to encouragement from the local entrepreneurs. The WI group, I argue, created a new social role for local women and expanded their existing role in the community. They were known as WI members rather than the wives of such-and-such people. I have also described how the activities in which they took part gave them the opportunity to interact with women from other villages. The WI was the means of creating a group of women that distinguished themselves from the non-members in the community and also played an important role in creating and maintaining ties between the families of WI members.

The Increase in Self-awareness and Reflection

I showed above how most of the local entrepreneurs were not highly qualified but gained their skills from their previous experience as small-business operators. However, it was observed that their participation in business increased their awareness of the importance of skills and education. One of the first chalet operators in the village told me that on account of his business, he himself decided to develop his formal business skills by taking several entrepreneurial and motivation courses offered by the local colleges or MARA besides learning from the other local businessmen. As an ex-soldier, he knew that to be successful in business, one needed to be disciplined and motivated. He told me, "You have to find the skill yourself (*cari sendiri*), no one will give it to you. Don't wait for the government to help. I applied and paid for all the courses myself."

Besides improving themselves as skilled businessmen, these local entrepreneurs also encouraged others to follow suit. The importance of education and formal skills in business was instilled in the children by the parents who gave them practical guidance. They trained their children by asking them to help in the chalet or the shop. Then they groomed their children as future business people by sending them to local colleges or university to study business and management. Bakar, who was among the first chalet operators on Langkawi, started delegating the management of his chalet to his eldest son, Aziz. To prepare him for the business, Bakar encouraged him to take a six-month hotel management course at the National Productivity Centre. After graduating from the Centre, Aziz, at the age of 24, began to take over the management of the chalet, guided by his father from a distance. At this point, Bakar went to the chalet only once a week, particularly after the Friday prayer, to make an inspection or to discuss any problems that had arisen. Then it was Aziz's turn to train his younger brother, who was 20, and help him choose a suitable college course. At the time of my fieldwork, his brother was still studying at a college in Sungai Petani, a main town of Kedah state. Aziz told me that he was planning to ask his brother to gain experience by working at the hotel nearby before taking a serious part in the family business. As he said, "Let him work with other people (*bawah orang lain*) and earn his own money so that he will learn to manage his own money and appreciate it...young people must learn how to control their money, otherwise they will take what they have for granted. That's the most important thing in business."

Beside management skills, these local entrepreneurs also realised that it was vital to master the basics of mathematics and English language to expand their business networks. Md Pishal (1990) indicated that there was a large number of local entrepreneurs who were still lacking skills in financial management. Ismail "the millionaire" also admitted to me that although he had much business experience, it was

still not enough for business expansion, for he did not have certain skills such as accounting, management and English. He pointed out that his lack of English, in particular, made it difficult for him to participate in major conferences where English was used as the medium of communication. He described to me his embarrassing experience at a conference that he attended in Singapore. He found it very hard to understand what was said and had difficulty in interacting with the other participants because he did not know a word of English. Sloane has mentioned the use of English as a business language among the Malay entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur (1999: 179). Ismail's lack of interaction with other business people could make it difficult for him to establish his business network and therefore expand his business. Having experienced that embarrassing moment, he decided to send his sons to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills at the local college.

Self-consciousness was mostly felt among this group of people owing to their experiences, having lived or studied outside the community. They thought more about what was happening locally and they were concerned about the future of the younger generation. The drastic changes brought by tourism on Langkawi really worried Shahrul who had returned a few years earlier after graduating from an overseas university. Now, he had a secure job as a marketing officer in one of the established companies on the island. After living and studying in a boarding school outside Langkawi since he was 15 years old and then abroad for four years, he could foresee the future of the local younger generation if it was not properly guided. His endeavours to help young people were revealed when my younger foster sister, aged 12, went on a weekend motivation programme in Kuah town.

The motivation programme attracted many local women when it was announced at one of the WI meetings even though they had to pay RM 50 for the three days. My

foster cousin, Milah, insisted on sending her 12-year-old daughter despite objections from her husband, who said that it was too expensive. In persuading her husband, my foster cousin compared their children with those of the other WI members. Trying to make her point, Milah argued, "Look at them ...most of them have registered their children for the programme. They [the other children] will improve, but our child will be the one left behind." She was so disappointed with her husband's decision and told me, "We should invest for our children's future...we can find the money." Thinking that I could convince her husband because I was an overseas student, Milah persuaded me to explain to her husband, who she said, would listen to me. "You tell him, he will listen to you because you're also studying." However, her husband eventually agreed when he discovered that the fees could be paid by instalments.

On the registration day, many of the children were sent by their parents, who were mostly civil servants and local entrepreneurs. It was revealed that the participation of the local women in the WI group and their efforts had heightened the villagers' awareness of the importance of education (*ilmu*) for the future generation. However, this is not to presume that such awareness did not exist previously. The fact that many Langkawi people now had a higher income enabled them to educate their children to a higher level. Until recently, lower incomes, the lack of competition, less need for a high-level education for local employment were the reasons why many of the islanders had only basic schooling.

Furthermore, local people do not have to worry about children having to study outside Langkawi, for several colleges have been opened on the island. The newly established Kolej Legenda received its first intake of 2,000 students in early 1998.¹⁷ This number was expected to increase to 9,000 students arriving on Langkawi within

¹⁷ *Warkah Langkawi*, Berita Harian, 2 July 1998.

three years. The college was established as a franchise of the Mara Institute of Technology (ITM), which offered diploma courses in accounting, business studies, hotel management, computer science and programming. In addition, the Tun Abdul Razak College (TAR), which was opened much earlier than the Kolej Legenda, also encouraged local people to send their children to acquire knowledge and skills there.

The increasing number of new private colleges being opened and the arrival of students from outside Langkawi inspired the islanders to encourage their children to pursue their studies. One day I was asked by my foster mother to collect her cousin's daughter who had just arrived from the mainland to study computing at the local college. My younger foster sister insisted on coming too and when we reached the college, my younger foster sister was very excited and told her mother that she wanted to be "like them." The heightened awareness of the importance of education is also attributed to the various fostering projects (*projek anak angkat*) organised for students from universities outside Langkawi.

The *projek anak angkat* has become an annual tradition for all universities in Malaysia as part of the country's social community programme. It is organised by the universities with the aim of exposing their students to people from rural areas and at the same time helping the villagers by doing community service. The students become the foster children of the villagers for a certain length of time. During their stay, various activities are arranged to include both students and villagers, such as *gotong royong*, as well as a motivation programme for the children. During my fieldwork, I met many families who had taken in university students as their foster children. The father of one family showed me proudly a row of gifts from their foster children from different universities. He then admitted that his foster children had inspired his eldest daughter to study hard like "her foster sisters" and she was now a university student.

Local Entrepreneurs and the Community

One might argue that the emergence of this new group of local entrepreneurs would gradually bring about their detachment from their community. On Langkawi, however, these people were seen to play an active part in village life, and it is argued here that this was closely related to the assertion of their new status in the community. Since they were still living in the same place, their adherence to local values was still expected, regardless of occupation. In fact, these local entrepreneurs toed the line as a way of attaining status and respect in the village. By showing that they were 'not arrogant' (*tak sombong*) despite having a big car or a big house, they gained more respect from their fellow villagers. This practice of 'not being arrogant' could be manifested in various ways by mixing with the local villagers, taking part in local functions, and offering facilities free or at a reduced rate to the community.

During a feast or function at the mosque, I often heard a group of women expressing their admiration of Din for his hard work in helping to organise the event. One of the women said, "He is really good: he never fails to go to the mosque every evening" (*dia tu rajin, tiap-tiap petang tak pernah "miss" pergi ke masjid*). The fact that Din was such a busy person as a businessman but still made time to go to the mosque was something that was really admired.

I was preparing food with a group of local women for a feast at the mosque when a silver Mercedes Benz entered the mosque compound. Karim, a local man in his mid-fifties, wearing traditional dress, *pelikat sarung*, *capal* (leather sandals) and a white *kopiah* (cap), emerged from the car. One of the local women whispered to me, "Look at him...he is a millionaire (*jutawan*) but he is a really nice person; he always comes to the

mosque.” When I was first introduced to him, I never thought that he was a *jutawan* for he did not fit my picture of a *jutawan*. On that occasion, he wore a short-sleeved shirt and trousers of an old-fashioned cut, and he never went out without his *kopiah*. Now, on the one hand Karim was trying to show his degree of affluence by driving his expensive car to the mosque and on the other hand he was trying to show his piety by making an effort to mix with his fellow villagers. In this way, he expected to earn more respect from the community and thereby assert his social status.

Another illustration of this phenomenon was the daily life of Syukur, also a chalet operator in the village. When Syukur offered me his chalet for three nights to do my ‘observation,’ I had the opportunity to witness his daily schedule as a chalet operator. He normally started work around 9 o’clock after his wife had left for work at the school near his house, which was only 5-minutes’ drive from his chalet. He would bring his 3-year old daughter to the chalet and let her play in one of the rooms at his office, which has been converted into a restroom either for his daughter to play in or for him to perform his five daily prayers. Sometimes, it was also used to entertain relatives or friends who came for a chat. His sister, who was also working with him as a housekeeper, would also take care of his daughter when he was busy making arrangements for a new group of tourists who were due to arrive soon or when he went to town on official business.

During the lunch hour, he would go to the nearest restaurant, or to his own restaurant, which was managed by his older brother. Just before 5 o’clock, he returned home to perform his *asar* prayer, and then came back to the chalet with his sports kit – T-shirt and shorts – to play *sepaktakraw* with his male employees. There were five of the team comprising Farid, a tourist guide, a gardener, and his two assistants (night watchmen) gathered in front of the chalet’s office. The game was an excuse for informal

chatting rather than taking exercise. They formed a small circle and started kicking and passing the ball to one another, joking and teasing the while. Sometimes the conversation would range from their business problems to the next scheme for attracting more customers. Friends from the village nearby came on their motorbikes and joined in. Whoever felt that he had had enough would simply withdraw from the group. At around half past six the game would come to an end and everybody returned home to perform the *maghrib* prayer and have dinner with their families. On the way back to his house, Syukur and his daughter would go to the school to collect his wife. On arriving home, he would bath his daughter and then get ready to go to the mosque to perform the *maghrib* prayer. Syukur did not always go to the mosque to pray but would usually make the effort for the *maghrib* prayer when he was not too busy with his work. Wearing his traditional *baju kurung*, *sarung pelikat*, a white cap and sandals, he went by car or motorcycle to the mosque to carry out his commitment as an *orang Islam*.

The high status of these local entrepreneurs in the community was also manifested by their being entrusted with positions of responsibility. Din, for example, had been selected as a mosque committee member (*Jawatankuasa Tertinggi Masjid*). As one of the higher committee members, he was responsible for maintaining the mosque and organising the functions that were to be held there. Therefore, he would spend almost every evening in the building. He was so busy that every time that I called at his house to arrange an interview with him, his wife would advise me to go to the mosque to see him. Entrepreneurs such as Din realised that the other villagers had high expectations of them because they had access to capital and local politics. I suggest that this created a sense of obligation among them to adhere to the values of Islam and their community.

Their identity as *orang kampung* and *orang Islam* was constantly reiterated to remind them to maintain their values such as helping one another (*tolong menolong*), regardless of social status or business connections. Sloane (1999) has argued how the affluent and ambitious urban Malay entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur city who were living far away from their *kampung* often regarded or described themselves still as ‘just *kampung* boys’ although they had had an urban childhood, been given an English-style education and also had different social experiences (1999: 90). The local entrepreneurs on Langkawi were very conscious of their behaviour and would often relate it to “what the local villagers would say.” Their identity as *orang kampung* was emphasised by statements such as “we *orang kampung* did not do things like that” or “living in a *kampung* is not being arrogant.” They had a strong awareness of their values as Muslims in the sense that they often considered whether they were behaving appropriately as Muslims and would comment that their business colleagues should not do certain things. These people often maintained that anything that was not acceptable in Islam was not negotiable. As one of the chalet operators said, “What is *haram* [unlawful] is still *haram*...we cannot change the *haram* into *halal* [lawful].” This discussion shows that the local entrepreneurs realised that in facing business challenges, particularly in tourism, they had to negotiate and adapt certain aspects of their values.

Chalet Operators: Kinship Ties

The fact that the local chalet operators were still living in the same village and were related to one another might explain their continuing strong attachment to their community. The villagers always knew that they were related for they would tell me, “We’re all related (*saudara*) in this village.” However, they did not always know how closely they were related to one another. When I analysed the operation of the chalets in Kg Senang, I discovered that nine out of thirteen chalet operators (almost 70 per cent) in

Kg Senang were related to one another as either *saudara jauh* (distant kin) or *saudara dekat* (close kin). The closest kin between the chalet owners was first cousin, and, interestingly, all the chalet operators in Kg Senang were cousins (*saudara sepupu*). For example, Din Tandy Beach Motel was first cousin to Aziz, the owner of Data Motel, while Aziz and Shahid, the owner of Mawar Tanjung Motel, were second cousins. While Aziz and Saad (Athila Motel's owner) were second cousins, Saad and Bohari (the owner of Sweet Sand Motel) were also second cousins. My foster father himself was cousin to Bakar, who owned the DA Motel.

Carsten (1997) has shown how in earlier times, the village she studied was inhabited by only a few people who had migrated there from other parts of Peninsular Malaysia and other regions. These migrants became Langkawi people partly through marriage. Since they were a small community, they tended to intermarry. In Malay kinship, marrying cousins is a way of strengthening the bond between relatives. Although the newly married couple was encouraged to live separately from their parents, residing near them was however, preferable. Then the other siblings or relatives might follow by building another house near them. Gradually, the whole area was occupied by their own relatives, and the circle expanded until it formed a *kampung* (village).

Similarly in Kg Senang, most villagers were related. The majority of the chalet operators built their chalets on their ancestral land (*tanah pesaka*). According to my survey, most of the land owned by them had been inherited for six generations. During the first and second generations the land had been used for rice cultivation and mixed farming. However, when it was inherited by the fifth generation, it was gradually converted from agriculture to commercial purposes such as chalet management and other tourism-related businesses. It was also during this period that land ownership was passed to outsiders when some of the local villagers sold their land to take advantage of

soaring prices. Those who still retained their land began to build chalets, particularly in the coastal area. The kinship between these chalet operators and the fact that their chalets were built on the ancestral land were shown by the close proximity of these buildings, side by side along the main road and parallel to the coastline. For example, the chalets owned by Bakar, Shukri, Bohari and Basri, who were all second cousins to one another, were built side by side on their inherited land.

Middle Class or 'Not Quite There'?

The participation of Langkawi people in the local tourist industry, particularly the chalet business, has produced a group of local entrepreneurs. I have described how the emergence of this group has encouraged other local people to follow suit. It is undeniable that upsurge in business can be attributed to the incentive schemes, loans and contracts made available by the government with its implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Many scholars have debated the role of NEP, a 20-year plan whose main objective was to reduce economic inequality by social restructuring directed exclusively at Malays, and thus stimulate the emergence of Malay entrepreneurs (Abdul Rahman 1998; Sloane 1999). Shamsul (1995a), however, has argued that the idea and planning to create the "Malay economic man" was not simply a post-1969 phenomenon but had begun long before the establishment of the NEP. The NEP, which was established in 1970, was designed to create a modern Malay middle class with the aim of 30 per cent *Bumiputera* share ownership and participation in the corporate sector.

Although the aim of this policy was fulfilled in the cities, particularly in Kuala Lumpur (Sloane 1999), the rise of new Malay entrepreneurs actually started in the rural

areas (Shamsul 1986). Shamsul argues that the NEP, by putting into effect 'poverty eradication,' expanded Malay interests in business and commerce as a result of rural development and therefore created many new Malay entrepreneurs, mostly rural-based. The NEP had two central objectives: (1) to 'eradicate poverty,' aimed at the Malay rural poor; and (2) to 'restructure society,' that is, to create a 'community of Malay entrepreneurs' which indeed successfully created and expanded the Malay middle class. Some of its members have become extremely rich and active corporate players (Shamsul 1995a). The NEP, supported new business projects and increased employment, this facilitating a greater Malay participation in the formal economy, to produce what Mahathir termed the 'New Malay.'¹⁸

Shamsul argues that the new Malay entrepreneurs, who were mostly rural-based, were not engaged in 'mental production' like their educated urban counterparts. This group, which he describes as the 'emerging grassroots Malay new rich' (1995a: 5), was managing the traditional, medium-sized businesses such as handicrafts, or the wholesale business of primary commodities or direct selling.

The emergence of these local entrepreneurs would deny the assumption that the local people did not try to grasp business opportunities on Langkawi. It might be true to say that they might have been a little slow in responding, although this could be explained by the drastic changes and, furthermore, the lack of relevant skills and experience. As one local young businessman told me, "When the opportunities arrived, we were still thinking about what should be done...we were slow because we didn't

¹⁸ 'A new Malay' is portrayed as someone who "has a culture that is suitable to the changing times, who is willing to face all challenges, who can compete without assistance, who is educated and learned, sophisticated, sincere, disciplined, trustworthy and efficient. The New Malay should be an all-rounder, with a wide vision, and capable of restoring the dignity of Muslims and be a model for other Muslims" (Hung 1998: 94).

have experience. The others just grab.” The situation is emphasised by Din (1988). He argues that the factors making local Malays less responsive to the new opportunities were their lack of experience and the lack of access to business intelligence, despite being aware of the changes brought by tourism (ibid. 18).

Perhaps this was true during the early stages of tourism development on Langkawi. However, after ten years there are indeed huge changes in the way the local Malays respond to business opportunities. Abd Raub (1990) who did research on the island, looking at the impact of a tax-free port and the *bumiputera* participation in entrepreneurship, pointed out that having a sufficient infrastructure and a positive environment did not necessarily lead to an automatic increase in the participation of *bumiputera* in entrepreneurship.

I have to admit that it is quite difficult to know how this new group of entrepreneurs would fit into the definition of middle class. There has been extensive discussion of how to define the middle class, trying to answer the question of who they are and their impact on the local community. Giddens (1980) argues that the middle class is characterised as the possessors of educational qualifications and/or technical skill, therefore contrasting them in the same way as the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Saravanamuttu (1989), who applied the same approach of ‘the relations of production’ in Malaysia argued that the middle classes were not ethnically minded, but were more concerned with democracy. However, Kahn argues that differentiation between the middle class and the proletariat should not be based on “ownership, either the owners of skills and/or qualifications” (1996a: 22). He rejects the ‘relations of production’ approach to the Malaysian middle class by arguing that “the emergence of a new middle class, at least in postcolonial Malaysia, might have as much if not more to do with the

emergence of the modern state than with capitalist development *per se*" (Kahn 1996a: 24-25). He supports

The definition of the middle class which locates them primarily by reference not to relations of production or even what Bourdieu maintains are the relations of production of cultural capital, but to the processes of modern state formation both in the colonial and postcolonial periods.

(Kahn 1991: 56)

Kahn argues that one should stop trying to fit the 'middle class' into the model of a class established for nineteenth-century capitalism. He argues instead that to understand

Who the middle class actually are or why are they important and what difference they actually make, one should firstly recognise that the Malaysian middle classes are just as embedded in the state as they are in capitalist economic relations and that the sphere of political control is not simply reducible to the sphere of capitalist economic rationality.

(Kahn 1996a: 30)

This conceptual clarification of middle class makes it still difficult to produce an answer to the question of 'who they are'.

If a 'middle class' group should not be defined according to ownership and "is composed largely not of private, self-employed entrepreneurs or middle-ranking employees of private enterprises but those employed directly or indirectly by the state" (Kahn 1996a: 24), then the emergence of a new group on Langkawi, which comprises mainly local entrepreneurs and middle-ranking employees in the government or the private sector may not fit the definition of middle class. Abdul Rahman (1998) argues

that without denying the significant role of the state in the structural and social transformation of the Malaysian economy and society, the state role should not be overemphasised and it should not be assumed that production relations and cultural capital are of no relevance. He points out that to emphasise only the role of the state is empirically questionable and also, as he puts it, “smacks of determinism theoretically” (ibid. 102). Hence, Abdul Rahman argues that the capitalist relations of production, together with the state, were crucial in middle-class growth and expansion in Malaysia. Shamsul (1995a) divides the middle class component into analytical categories, namely the ‘old,’ manually oriented middle class which included small business people and the self-employed, and the ‘new,’ non-manual and mentally oriented middle class: professionals and bureaucrats. The latter were based in big cities but the former in both big cities, and rural towns and villages.

In the case of Langkawi, I argue that the emergence of local entrepreneurs, though still small in numbers, was indeed due to the development of the local tourist industry and the government support with its loan scheme and contracts. In addition to the islanders’ own initiative in finding entrepreneurial niches, these were the starting-point for them to change their status from that of fishermen or farmers to entrepreneurs. Although it may be true to a certain extent that they were rather slow in responding to business opportunities, the assertion was made far too often by authorities denying the capacity of the islanders to strive to develop in their own way. The above description of Kg Senang presents the efforts of a group of villagers in a local tourist industry, working alongside bigger tourism developers. It also shows the ability of the islanders to manage their own social development.

According to Shamsul’s (1995a) classification of the Malay middle class, the local entrepreneurs on Langkawi could be fitted into the ‘old’ category, which is higher

in numbers than the 'new' group. However, rather than trying to argue that this new group on Langkawi is a new 'middle class' group, I suggest that it might be closer to what Kahn described as the "Not Quite There." It should be noted here that these are the first generation of local entrepreneurs. They were mostly the children of the local Malay peasants and aged between 45 and 60. Unlike the urban-based middle class who comprised those in professional or managerial positions, the English-educated and the university graduates, the Langkawi entrepreneurs had only a primary school qualification.

Nevertheless, the difference in sources of income between local entrepreneurs and civil servants and employees in other occupations could be seen from the pattern of consumption. The distinction was gradually becoming clearer though it was still quite subtle. I have described how these local entrepreneurs started to indulge themselves in a new pattern of consumption, such as buying Mercedes Benz, Harley Davidson and sports cars. Car ownership could be used as an indicator of class stratification because the car was a status symbol and the second most expensive household item after the house itself (see Abdul Rahman 1998) who maintains that in developing countries like Malaysia, car ownership is an index of inequality.

However, in the case of Langkawi, it is suggested here that the close attachment of the local entrepreneurs to their community and their support for its activities have to some extent blurred this inequality of income. This is in contrast to the argument that a newly emerging class would distance itself from the traditional lifestyle and commitments (see Errington & Gewertz 1997). I also argue that the kinship ties between local entrepreneurs and the close proximity of their business premises and houses at least blurred this distinction. I have mentioned how these people often tried to avoid being described as 'rich' or 'having a lot of money'.

Despite their modesty about their wealth, the local entrepreneurs were quite boastful about their connections with people in higher authority (*orang atas*), such as politicians, which made them important figures (*orang penting*) in their local community. Their business activities gave them access to people in the local authorities, businessmen from outside Langkawi, and 'top people' in the government. The desire to be seen as having contact with 'people at the top' (*orang atas*) could be expressed in statements such as "I know him" (*saya kenal dia*), "I'm quite often talking to him" (*biasa cakap dengan dia*) or by reference to certain important people by name rather than by title. I could not help noticing one of my informants referring proudly to the VIPs whom he met, who came to his restaurant to have a 'chat' (*sembang*) whenever they visited Langkawi. The word 'chat' was used to emphasise the informality of the meeting and the closeness of his contact with the VIP. Another tactic was to refer to the VIP by his first name instead of by title (*Dato* or *Yang berhormat*). Such connections with and recognition by VIPs enhanced the status of the local entrepreneurs in their community.

This kind of connection was also observed among the women during the WI activities. I often heard how local women were persuaded to join the WI after being given the impression that they would meet and have a chance to become acquainted with the *Datin*, the Chair of the Langkawi Women's group. One local woman told me, "I really enjoy joining the WI; I've got a lot of friends and I can get to know the *Datin*. The other day I went to her house for a meeting." The other woman interrupted, "So now the *Datin* knows you...you have become famous now." This articulation of meeting the *Datin* has indeed manifested the underlying attainment of status and prestige among these local women.

Businessmen's comments that they "know such and such person" or "top people" also indicates how their commercial status enabled them to gain access to people in the higher ranks. This social networking was important to make themselves known so as to establish or expand their business or to acquire business contracts. Sloane (1999) argues that the importance of networking in Malay entrepreneurship was not only to uncover potential business opportunities and important sources of business information but also to gain access to high-level people. "Networking" was vital to "seek relationships with other economically ambitious Malays" and to provide them with the opportunities to link themselves to other "political figures" (see also Shamsul 1995a).

The increase in 'free time,' the difference in income sources, the new pattern of consumption and the efforts made to establish personal connections and business networks should be seen as the new entrepreneurs' inclination towards self-development and status enhancement. Although they were still closely connected to their community, they also wanted to be seen as having close connections with 'people at the top,' and were indeed proud of being known to *orang politik* (politicians). At the same time, they always maintained that they were still *orang kampung* and were aware that as potential role models, they should be seen to be not only successful entrepreneurs but also good Muslims. Does this desire for such connections indicate their aspirations to be in the same class as the 'people at the top'? It is argued here that the desire for new knowledge, education, new products and modern tastes reflects their aim for a higher social status. It is also suggested that such desires classify these local entrepreneurs as a new and distinct social group on Langkawi. However, the contradictory scenario of connection with their community as well as with 'people at the top' shows how they seemed to be pulled in two directions. Instead of becoming middle class, they were still

caught in the middle. They were neither here nor there: they were the Not Quite There group.

The local entrepreneurs earn a middle class income and try to consume a middle class lifestyle but at the same time still maintain connections with local people. This will be more visible in the second generation of local entrepreneurs. The strong emphasis on the importance of education today as shown by the establishment of new private colleges, the increase in household income, the degree of affluence that enables parents to send their children to college, and the number of external students on Langkawi who will be role models for the island children will mean that the proportion of diploma holders amongst Langkawi people will increase, thus expanding or providing education for the next and future generation. Abdul Rahman (1998) highlights the importance of educational attainment in social mobility and social class transformation. It is also suggested that such desires classify these local entrepreneurs as a new and distinct social group on Langkawi. However, the contradictory scenario of connection with their community as well as with 'people at the top' shows how they seemed to be pulled in two directions. Instead of becoming middle class, they were still caught in the middle. Neither here nor there, they were the 'Not Quite There' group. Given the gradual difference in levels of income and education and the increasing number of young entrepreneurs, one can expect a further consolidation of class stratification on Langkawi in the future. However, since the emergence of the first generation of local entrepreneurs depended on the development of local tourism, the question of whether or not the future generations will succeed in moving towards the middle class like their urban counterparts, is still to be answered. This will greatly depend on the level of tourism development on Langkawi.

Conclusion

The main thread that I have drawn from these chapters has been the idea that Langkawi people have adopted different strategies and engaged in negotiation in response to tourism development on the island. I have shown throughout this thesis the various aspects of this negotiation including consumption, modernity, the increase in distinctions between outsiders and insiders among villagers in the local community, and the formation of middle class society. My thesis offers examples of the different strategies used by Langkawi people not only to adapt to but also play an active part in local tourism. It is clear that the ways in which local people have dealt with the changes depend heavily on their social position and economic interest, which has led to diverse and ambivalent attitudes towards tourism development. Dogan (1989), who also argued that these different responses would emerge in the community, acknowledges this diverse response to tourism. The different strategies adopted by local people to participate in the local tourist industry should also be taken as an indication that they should not be seen as passive but as capable of accepting tourism and setting appropriate boundaries. This thesis looks at culture as dynamic and adaptive, and shows how local people are actively engaged in defining and redefining meanings and local values.

Much of the tourism literature rejects depiction of the host culture as lacking an internal dynamic and as a victim of tourism development (Sofield 1991; Boissevain 1992; Black 1996). In the case of Langkawi, despite a slow response in the early stages of tourism development, the islanders have demonstrated that they were not simply being forced to change but that they themselves initiated the changes in order to adapt. They began to realise their own potential and, indeed, this awareness promoted self-reflexivity. The emergence of a group of local

entrepreneurs proved the capability of local people in providing services and facilities for tourists.

This thesis has engaged with recent debate on the anthropology of tourism, which has called for a more balanced view of the impact of tourism (see Jafari 1991; Smith & Nash 1991; Hitchcock 1993; Dahles & Van Meijl 1999). This approach demands a deeper understanding of the human concerns of the impact (Archer & Cooper 1994). Debate in tourism studies usually focuses on the socio-cultural changes that affect local communities. In Kg Senang, the change of perception of hotel employment demonstrated that the villagers did not treat their local values as something static.

In my thesis, I have described the various changes that have occurred in the village of Kg Senang and in Langkawi as a whole since the rapid tourism development process on the island. These changes are reflected in two important areas that of changes in physical landscape, and changes in local people's perceptions on various aspects. I have described how the local government has spent billions of ringgits building basic infrastructure, including new modern buildings to replace the old wooden type, and also new hotels, resorts, chalets and other tourism services. These buildings have indeed changed the physical landscape of the island. I also discuss the changes in local perceptions such as towards hotel employment. What is significant in this perception is the employment of religious idioms to negate the past perception of hotel employment. This has enabled local people to take part in tourism services in their local area.

The development of tourism has also changed the local perception towards land. Land has become an important asset not only as inheritance but also to generate

money. Carsten (1997) argued that ownership of land and land inheritance was not a measurement of wealth differences. This was before tourism development took place in Langkawi. However, local perceptions have changed, and today land is viewed as a symbol of wealth. Those who have more land have greater access to an improved standard of living. All these changes occurred when the monetary value of land increased due to tourism development in Langkawi. Due to this, land has indeed become a means of wealth accumulation.

The arrival of new products has changed patterns of consumption by local people. This mass consumption was attributed to three factors: the arrival of new products and images, the increased level of contact with outsiders which created 'enthusiastic imitation' by local people, and increases in wages. High levels of income are manifested by the ostentatious display of luxury products such as brand-new cars and mobile phones. I have argued that these new possessions became the new symbol of material wealth, and those who owned them were viewed as 'having a lot of money' or as rich. The objects themselves were regarded as *moden* for they were available and widely owned only by people in cities. Local people began to create their own concept of *moden*. This *moden* image can be manifested through their bodily display such as the clothes they wear, the *moden* goods they possess and the type of products they use. Personal possession has become an important symbol of individual aspirations to be seen as *moden*.

Since this new pattern of consumption required individual participants to have a stable income to sustain their new lifestyle, having 'one's own money' (*duit sendiri*) became important, especially for women. This has resulted in the increased number of local women in waged employment. Although women in Malay society have often been portrayed as having autonomy in managing *duit belanja dapur*,

having *duit sendiri*, however, symbolised autonomy not only in managing money but also in spending money for their own pleasure. I have described in chapter 6 that *duit sendiri* referred to the money gained solely by women's efforts and therefore it was different from 'kitchen money,' which was usually given by the men for household expenditure.

This *duit sendiri* gave women a degree of economic independence because the money could be used as a vehicle to acquire new commodities and images and to realise their aspirations to become *moden*. In their view, low-waged employment was better than dependence on their husbands' income. Therefore, many local women preferred to work in the local tourist industry, such as hotels, chalets, restaurants and shopping centres. Some of them ran small-scale businesses such as direct selling, which produced an extra and stable income.

The changes in waged employment, the increased number of people involved in business, and the new pattern of consumption have led to new categorizations of people in the local community. People have been divided into different categories based on the ownership of property and type of income sources that they have, that is, *kerja sendiri* (self-employed), *makan gaji* (wage-earner) and *tak kerja* (unemployed). This categorisation and the perception that local entrepreneurs were rich and 'had a lot of money,' marked the intensification of class distinction in Langkawi.

Previously, inequalities in terms of wealth and income sources were less marked and generally the people in Langkawi were 'poor people'. However, despite their insistence on their similarity as 'village people', the differences in terms of wealth have begun to emerge in the local community. These differences have led to

the process of distinction not only to distinguish themselves from outsiders but within the local community. Although local people have always been in contact with outsiders, the contact has increased with improvements in transport from the mainland to the island and with the arrival of large numbers of employees from outside Langkawi. In chapter 2, I have discussed how local people, despite the increased close contact with these employees, still referred to themselves as *orang sini* (people of this place) as opposed to *orang luar* (outsiders).

When compared with foreign tourists, domestic tourists or outsiders would be described by local people as *orang kita* (people like us), but local people would automatically distance themselves from outsiders when issues between themselves as “Langkawi people” (*orang Langkawi*) and outsiders were discussed. Langkawi people viewed themselves as different from outsiders in their dress and dialect. Such distinctions have been reported in other tourist destinations (Pi-Sunyer 1989; Zarkia 1996). The perception that *orang luar*, particularly those who came from the city but were working in Langkawi, were more immodest, extrovert and morally loose has become a source of tension in the village. The outsiders, specifically young men and women, were said to have a strong influence on local young men in indulging in immoral behaviour. The lack of connection with and protection of a village community allowed them to have more freedom. Instead of casting a critical eye on foreign tourists, local people were more disapproving of the attitudes of domestic tourists, particularly Malays. I have shown in chapter 4 how local people perceived the majority of domestic tourists to be middle class (*kelas pertengahan*) and therefore “rich” and “arrogant.” The similar cultural values but different social status of domestic tourists have become a source of tension in the interactions between domestic tourists and local people.

Nevertheless, having viewed all the factors that have changed or are beginning to change, there are certain aspects of local culture, which are still practiced or at least which local villagers try to maintain, for example, the process of incorporation to become Langkawi people. Carsten (1997) has argued that kinship is a process of becoming and not a fixed state. This is done through a variety of means such as living together, fostering and marriage. I maintain that these practices are still operating today. Although the number of outsiders has increased, local villagers still seem to be excited about incorporating outsiders to become Langkawi people. However, the process does not include all outsiders. Since the outsiders have different aims or intentions, the process of incorporation has become selective. The process of incorporating outsiders to become Langkawi people would only have force when there is an element of 'willingness' on the part of outsiders. This element of willingness can be manifested through their effort to mix with local people, to get involved in local activities and also through the process of marriage and fostering. Thus, those who are unwilling to be incorporated would manifest the opposite behaviour through distancing themselves from local people and avoiding local activities.

Another important value which local people still try to maintain is their similarity as village people (*orang kampung*). Carsten (1997) has described how Langkawi people characterized themselves as poor people, linked to each other in an idiom of equality (1997: 12). As I have argued in my thesis, it is obvious that Langkawi people are not equal any more in terms of wealth and social status. The 'performance of modernity' by local people could be interpreted as their desire to be seen as *kaya* (rich) which emphasizes differences instead of erasing them among local people. Ironically, local people were still trying to maintain their similarities as *orang kampung* by expecting everyone to perform their role in local activities, no

matter how high their social status. In fact, those who have a high social position, for example, local established entrepreneurs, who are still active in local activities and willing to mix with local people get more respect from the co-villagers. This strong emphasis on participating in local activities could be seen as a subtle way to reduce the gradual differences that began to intrude in the local community.

Attachment to these values seemed to be in conflict with the desire to widen social networks with 'people at the top'. However, the only way to maintain social status in the local community was to adhere to *kampung* values, because respect could be gained only by demonstrating the humility of taking part in local activities. Showing that a person was not arrogant (*tak sombong*) and liked to mix with the local community (*suka campur orang*) was an important part of *kampung* values. Villagers who were said to be rich and detached themselves from local villagers would be labeled as *sombong*. There were a few of this type who did not mix with local people (*tak suka campur orang*) and therefore gained less respect from the local community.

There are three significant themes that I emphasize in my thesis. The first is religious faith. In Langkawi, the religious faith of villagers had a particularly strong influence on their negotiation with tourism. I have argued that religious faith is an important element in the study of the impact of tourism. The debate on the new perception of tourism development was also greatly influenced by religious background, which has become a central topic in this thesis. The discourse of Islamic practices in Langkawi focuses on responsibilities and duties as *orang Islam* (Muslim people) and also on *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (unlawful) money or profit. The discussion coalesces around their main objective as *orang Islam*, that is, to earn *halal* money for their families. Local debate focuses on the notions of 'weak *iman* (faith)',

‘strong *iman*’, or ‘having no shame’ (*tak ada malu*) and these usually describe practices rather than particular individuals. Local people seemed reluctant to assert that particular individuals were ‘pure Muslim’, ‘less Muslim’ or ‘not Muslim’ to avoid offending them. Taib (1985) notes the sensitivity of this question, although some of the Muslims in his study did not perform their religious duties regularly.

In chapter 5, I described how religious idioms were employed by local people to enable them to take part in the tourism services of their local area. The idiom of “becoming knowledgeable” (*dah cerdik*) was employed to negate the past perception of hotel employment. This idiom was used to show that “people of today” were more open-minded (*fikiran terbuka*). The negation of past perceptions and the reliance on faith and *pandai jaga diri* opened the door to employment in tourism, particularly in hotels, without the stigma of immorality. Kamal (1996) notes that the usage of these socio-religious and cultural concepts emphasised the acknowledgement and affirmation of fundamental Islamic tenets. The use of religious idioms to change past perceptions to enable the adaptation of a ‘modern’ identity has been reported in Java by Brenner (1996). Brenner describes how the Javanese Muslim women who adopted the veil invoked the idiom of “becoming aware” as a means of distancing themselves from their own past and re-creating themselves as modern Muslims.

Religious faith is thus an important aspect of the study of the impact of tourism. In Malta, Black (1996) has described how the Roman Catholic faith acted as a major force in defining limits of legitimate social activity. It was used to ensure that a certain separation was maintained between the behaviour of the tourists and what was seen as culturally appropriate for the local community. Many scholars have acknowledged the tensions that exist in a Muslim host community owing to the differences between Islamic values and “touristic values” (Din 1989b), although it

remains unclear what is meant by “touristic values.” Several scholars have done research on the Islamic pilgrimage as a form of tourist activities and tourism activities in Islamic countries (Ritter 1975; Ahmed 1992), but less on how Muslims cope with tourism. The lack of studies on this topic is perhaps because religion has been underplayed not only in the promotion of tourism but also in tourism literature. In Malaysia, the promotion of tourism has focused on the diversity of cuisine and festivals, also on the friendliness and hospitality of its population, but Islam was distanced in official promotions (Din 1989b: 557-58).

The second theme which I have emphasized is the change of local perceptions towards land. The threat of land acquisition implemented by the local authorities has produced anxiety and fear among local people about their future. I have shown that this anxiety about their future lives and those of their children has gradually changed attitudes towards land. I argue that the change in attitude towards land was its gradual association in the minds of the people of Langkawi with their identity and its recognition as a symbol of economic security. Today the perception that land is a symbol of both wealth and their ‘existence’ in the local territory is strongly manifested by local people.

Previously, long residence in a particular area could be an important determinant of rights to the land. However, the demands of tourism and the implementation of the Land Acquisition Act has meant that land could be taken away by the government at any time. Land had become a symbol of security for the future generations (see Clark 1966). Villagers view land as an asset for inheritance and a means of giving them a local identity. This association of land with identity emerged during the struggles to retain land. Villagers said that if they were landless, they could simply be marginalized or even expelled from Langkawi. Therefore, if there

were no land for their children to inherit, then their children's future in the local territory would be uncertain. In this case, I observed that land was not so much a symbol of legacy or an ancestral reminder to one's descendants (cf. McKay 1987), for Langkawi people are more concerned with the future generations (see Carsten 1990, 1995). In addition, for Langkawi people, land also means 'money' and it is land, which has produced millionaires. It was reported that several Langkawi people had become *jutawan* (millionaires) by selling land.¹ However, local people preferred to sell *tanah sendiri* (one's own land) rather than their ancestral land (*tanah pesaka*). Tourism development has changed Langkawi peoples' perceptions towards land, particularly *tanah pesaka*, has become like an insurance policy for their future generations.

The third theme I have delineated is the emergence of a new middle class group in the local community. The increased awareness of the importance of education, the increase in income and leisure time, and the consumption of *moden* lifestyle has been associated with the formation of a new middle class group in the local community. The growth of local entrepreneurs, in particular, has gradually created differences in income sources and therefore strengthened the middle-class income group. Although I have argued that it is still "not quite there" (Kahn 1996a, 1996b), these people showed their desire to be accepted as members of the middle class by making connections with 'people at the top' (*orang atas*). However, I maintain that this is not a self-conscious act of detaching themselves from other villagers and trying to re-create a group with a new identity. On the contrary, they still try to maintain their connections with local people. In fact, these entrepreneurs gained a higher social status from their active role in the community, in part through their generous hospitality and their ability to act as leaders. Their identity as village

¹ "8 People Become Millionaires" (*Utusan Malaysia*, 25 January 1991).

people (*orang kampung*) was often emphasised when they were asked about their strong attachment to the local community. Their awareness that they were *still* village people (*tetap orang kampung*), no matter what their occupation, either businessmen or civil servants, heightened their sense of obligation to be part of village life. This is quite the reverse of the class formation in the community in Wewak, Papua New Guinea as discussed by Errington & Gewertz (1997) who describe their informants as a 'middle class elite' who engaged themselves with international organisations such as the Rotary Club as a basis for the making of a sophisticated elite. Gooberman (1999) also describes her informants as 'middle class' Honiarans who detached themselves from the rural lifestyle and re-create themselves as a discrete middle-class group.

In Langkawi, the entrepreneurs still stressed their *kampung* values – to help one another, not to be arrogant (*tak sombong*), to mix with the local community (*campur orang*) – but at the same time they had a comfortable lifestyle with new cars and houses. They claimed that by contact with outsiders and tourists, their awareness of being *orang Islam* and *orang kampung* was heightened. The role of tourism in promoting self-awareness, self-confidence, pride and solidarity among people in host communities has been reported in European countries (Sofield 1991; Boissevain 1992). This strong attachment to local people, as I have argued in chapter 7, was due to the fact they were still living within the *kampung* and were surrounded by the same neighbours and relatives. Their reluctance to mention their wealth might also indicate their efforts in upholding Islamic values that emphasised equality. As Kamal points out, the effective Muslim family is the one that lives in harmony, "use[ing] the economic resources and bounties of God in the proper way and project[ing] a lifestyle of moderation and religious piety, while maintaining friendly relationships with their neighbours and other co-citizens" (1996:117).

One feature that struck me when discussing these major themes and other related themes in this thesis was their contradictory nature. The same strategy was used ambiguously and often paradoxically in every theme that I have discussed in these chapters. For example, in Langkawi, the religious idioms of 'strong faith' (*kuat iman*) and "taking care of one's own self" (*pandai jaga diri*) were employed by local people as moral guidance for those who wanted to participate in local tourism services. However, since these religious idioms were open to various interpretations, problems could arise because they were used ambiguously and sometimes in contradictory ways. This created tension when the same religious idioms were also employed by another group of local people who were indulging in behaviour that seemed to contradict Islamic teachings. If one group used these religious idioms as a 'defence' against un-Islamic behaviour, another group also used them as a 'defence' to justify their actions. I have argued that it was the same religious idioms, interpreted differently, which led to different practices by different groups of people in the community. Therefore, the employment of religious idioms, which was so integrated in local culture, had a contradictory purpose when it was used not only as a source of moral guidance but also as a means of 'defence.' Ironically, the main objective of both groups was the same, that is, to enable them to participate in local tourism.

I have described the emergence of differences among villagers, who previously distinguished themselves only from people who lived in cities and those who earned a salary (Carsten 1997). Although local people have always been in contact with outsiders, the contact has increased with improvements in transport from the mainland to the island and with the arrival of large numbers of employees from outside Langkawi. In chapter 2, I have discussed how local people, despite the increased close contact with these employees, still referred to themselves as *orang*

sini (people of this place) as opposed to *orang luar* (outsiders).

Domestic tourists or outsiders would be described by local people as *orang kita* (people like us) when compared with foreign tourists but they would automatically distance themselves from outsiders when issues between themselves as “Langkawi people” (*orang Langkawi*) and outsiders were discussed. For local people, outsiders were different from them because of their dress and dialect. The perception that *orang luar*, particularly those who came from the city but were working in Langkawi, were morally loose had become the source of tension in the village. The young men and women from outside Langkawi were claimed to have a strong influence on local young people in indulging in immoral behaviour. The lack of connection with and protection of a village community allowed them to have more freedom. Local people were more disapproving of the attitudes of domestic tourists, particularly Malays, than of foreign tourists. In chapter 4, I have shown how local people perceived the majority of domestic tourists to be middle class (*kelas pertengahan*) and therefore ‘rich’ and ‘arrogant’. “They come from the city and show that they’re rich by demanding good services and complaining.”

Paradoxically, this distinction from outsiders seemed to be less emphasised when outsiders, particularly those from the city of Kuala Lumpur, were used as the point of reference and inspiration to become *moden*. I have described in chapter 6 how the increased level of contact with outsiders has created an ‘enthusiastic imitation’ by local people wishing to become modern. Becoming *moden* was expressed in bodily displays of an urban lifestyle and objectification of *moden* commodities, which Schien (1999) refers to as the “performance of modernity.” The people who followed this trend usually had a stable income and therefore the performance itself became a sign of being ‘rich’ or ‘having a lot of money.’

However, a contradiction occurred when those who wanted to be seen as 'having a lot of money' actually denied the suggestion of 'having a lot of money.' This denial was not so much because they did not have money but rather to avoid being labeled *berlagak* (show off). Interestingly, *berlagak* may be expressed not in words but in conspicuous bodily displays of urban lifestyles.

In the case of Langkawi, becoming *moden* and the images of modernity were based on local rather than Western models. Mills (1997, 1999) has discussed how Thai people viewed Bangkok as the production of symbols of Thai progress and 'modern' styles, which have attracted rural youth to migrate to the city. In Langkawi, local people were trying to be seen as *moden* as the people from the city, especially Kuala Lumpur. The intriguing aspect of the relationship between outsiders and Langkawi people was the paradoxical role of outsiders. Outsiders were seen not only as the source of tension but also the source of aspirations to become *moden*.

The contradictory nature of perceptions of local people towards the federal government is manifested when they claimed that government has played an important role in bringing development to the island but at the same time has also played a role in creating tension and conflict with local people. I have shown throughout these chapters that the involvement of the local and federal government in the development of tourism in Langkawi should not be underestimated. In chapter 1, I described the extensive power of the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) in planning development and implementing regulations. In chapter 3 I discussed how LADA decided which tourist incentives should be implemented and developed, and how Langkawi as a new holiday destination should be presented to tourists. LADA had extensive power in manipulating local myths and reinventing new meanings and concepts to emphasise the identity of Langkawi as a "mythical island."

Similarly, in chapter 7, I have shown that the local government's role in providing incentives and a loan scheme allowed a number of local entrepreneurs to emerge in response to the new business opportunities generated by the arrival of increasing numbers of tourists. The government schemes through the NEP (New Economic Policy), which had previously concentrated on urban areas, were now encouraging entrepreneurs in the rural economy. In this case, the majority of local people agreed that it was the efforts of the government that enabled development to take place on the island. In chapter 1, I described how the duty-free port status, declared by the federal government, became the catalyst in boosting the local tourist industry. It has been argued that tourism has been a popular choice as a means of economic development and some leaders also see it as a personal political tool (Richter 1980). Elsewhere Richter (1993) has also pointed out that tourism policy in most countries in Southeast Asia has been chosen by the powerful for political and economic advantage. The apparent intervention by the federal government and its focused attention on Langkawi accelerated the rate of development. However, the extensive power of the federal government in the development of Langkawi also became the source of conflict between local authorities and local people. The implementation of land acquisition by the local government, which I discussed in chapter 2, produced anxiety and fear among the islanders that they might be gradually marginalised and then forced to leave the island.

According to local people, tourism development on Langkawi was "what the government (*kerajaan*) wanted." When they referred to "the government", they usually meant "Mahathir." The personal participation of Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister, was a well-known fact. One local man expressed to me his anguish when his land was taken to be developed by LADA. He said repeatedly that the "government" should not be doing such things to village people like him. I asked

him why he accused the government instead of LADA or the local authorities. He then looked at me and asked, "Who owns LADA?" Not expecting me to answer him, I replied, "The government," and then asked him again "Who is the government?" Again he answered, "Mahathir." His remarks indicated the powerful influence of Mahathir Mohamad in the development of Langkawi.

One significant aspect of this discussion has been the influence of external forces. It became clear that external powers were largely responsible for the transformation of Langkawi Island and its integration into a global tourism industry within a short time. As tourism has become globalised, there is an increasing need for governments to create more holiday destinations. The globalisation of tourism is evident in the increase in 'deterritorialization' by the construction of 'hyperspaces' such as international airports, multinational hotel chains and franchise restaurants (Kearney 1995) as experienced in Langkawi Island. The debate on globalisation has shown how the form of society is changed and determined not only by internal forces but also by global flows (see Lockhart 1993; Butler 1996).

I have represented the response of Langkawi people to tourism development as multifaceted, and full of contradictions and conflicts. Different interests and expectations have produced differences of opinion in the community. The contradictory nature of the negotiation has shown the ambiguity of responses in contrast to Doxey's irritative index analysis (1976), which argued that local people's reaction towards tourism and tourists could be identified in four stages: euphoria, apathy, annoyance and antagonism. Hasan Zafar Dogan (1989) also discusses the multiple reactions of the host community to the influx of tourists: from active resistance to the complete acceptance, and even adoption of the tourist culture. I have shown instead of going through each stage, local people's attitudes towards tourists

may change, although they do not necessarily become more antagonistic, for they depend on many complex factors.

Langkawi people showed their flexible attitude, realised new opportunities, were open to change, and made a great effort to participate and change their socio-economic status. This thesis shows that local responses and experience of tourism can be understood only by looking at how the relationship between culture, values and meanings are transformed and maintained through negotiation. As I have discussed in chapter 1, local people generally accepted development, although I am aware that the transformation of Langkawi was due not only to tourism, but occurred together with urbanisation. The fact that development on Langkawi depended so much on tourism made it impossible to separate the effects of tourism from those derived from allied developmental factors. Tourism development in Langkawi could be viewed as a "mixed blessing", carrying both opportunities and dangers. Whether the next decade of tourism development in Langkawi will bring more opportunities or intensify the dangers will depend ultimately on the commitment of government planners and local authorities, and the active participation of local entrepreneurs and other Langkawi people.



Plate 1: *The agency* – The RM30 million 10-storey LADA complex stands out in Kuah town.

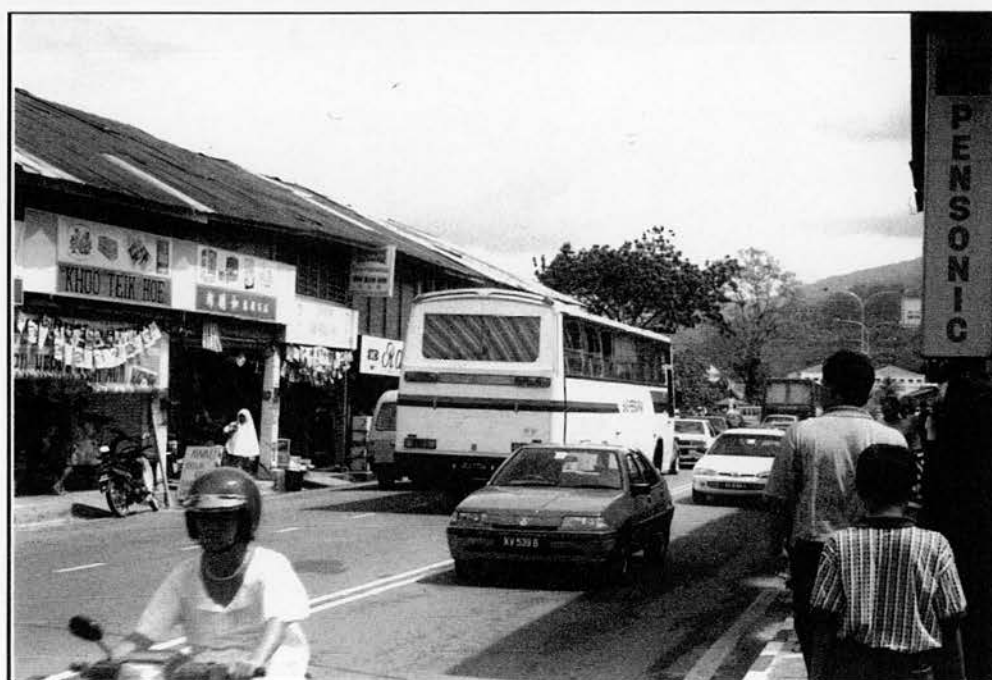


Plate 2: *Busy town* – Part of Kuah showing the old wooden shopfronts, which are waiting to be replaced.

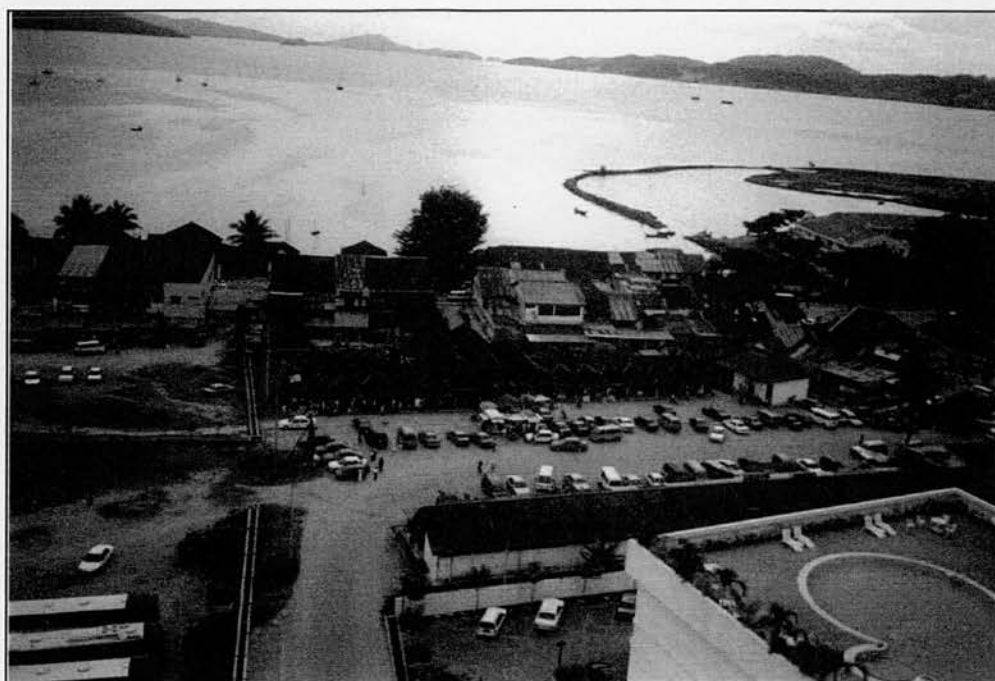


Plate 3: *Old Kuah* – Old shop-lots next to the Bayview Hotel, which was the tallest hotel in Langkawi.



Plate 4: *New Kuah* – These blocks of shop-lots gradually replaced the old buildings.



Plate 5: *Caught on camera* - A local woman trying to operate a video camera.



Plate 6: *Women at leisure* - a group of villagers resting and cleaning shellfish.



Plate 7: **A touch of tranquility** – A common tourist image of Langkawi.
(Adapted and extracted from a postcard published and distributed by Fotofocus: photo by Dennis M. Allen).



Plate 8: **Langkawi by motorbike** - A tourist couple stopped to take a photograph while on 'Round Island' trip.



Plate 9: *Sky's the limit* – This RM 1.18 million eagle statue has become a new Langkawi landmark and tourist attraction.



Plate 10: *"I've Been There"* - A group of domestic tourists trying to find a better position to photograph the eagle.



Plate 11: *'Legenda Park'* – The park entrance featuring a man-made rock called *Gondwana Wall*.



Plate 12: *The Celebration Gallery* - *'Legenda Park'* as seen from the top of the celebration gallery. The LADA complex can be seen in the distance.



Plate 13: *Beauty* – A Mahsuri portrait as envisioned by a local artist.



Plate 14: *Collection of souvenirs* – various forms of souvenirs based on the Mahsuri portrait sold at a gift shop in the Mahsuri mausoleum



Plate 15: *Walk of leisure* - A group of Malay tourists on the beach. While this photo was taken a group of tourist guides were trying to get the girls to play beach ball with them.



Plate 16: *Student outing* – Local college students from outside Langkawi.



Plate 17: *Chalet Operator at Work* – A chalet operator in her office.



Plate 18: *Zero Tolerance* – A notice on the wall at a local chalet.



Plate 19: *A display of contrast-* A brand new car parked in a 'special' garage.

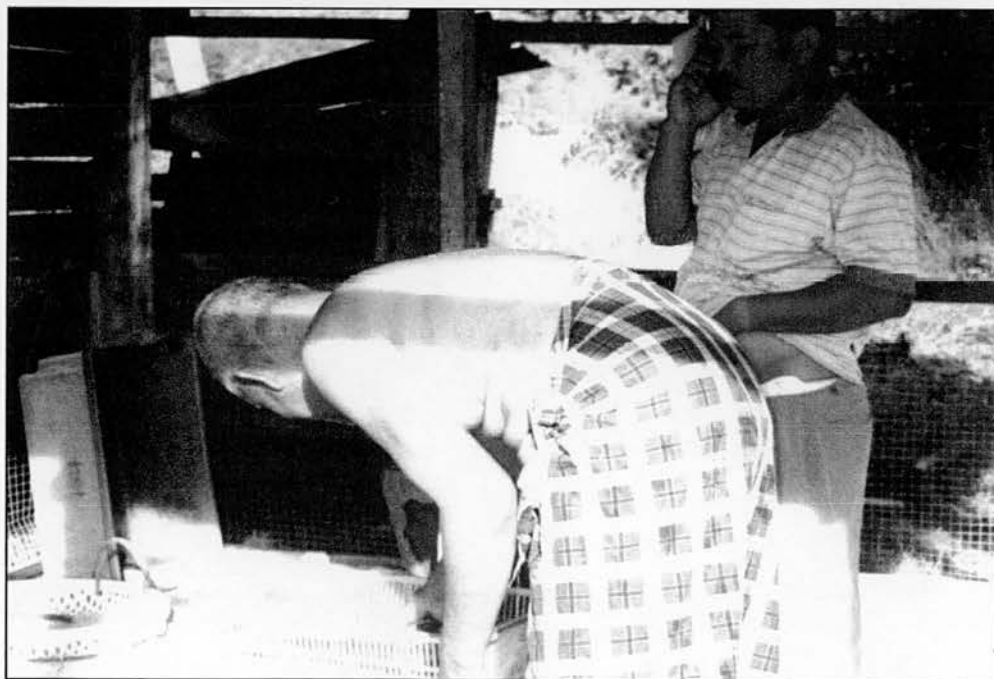


Plate 20: *Mobile business-* A middleman tries to contact a colleague while the seller chooses the best prawns off the day.

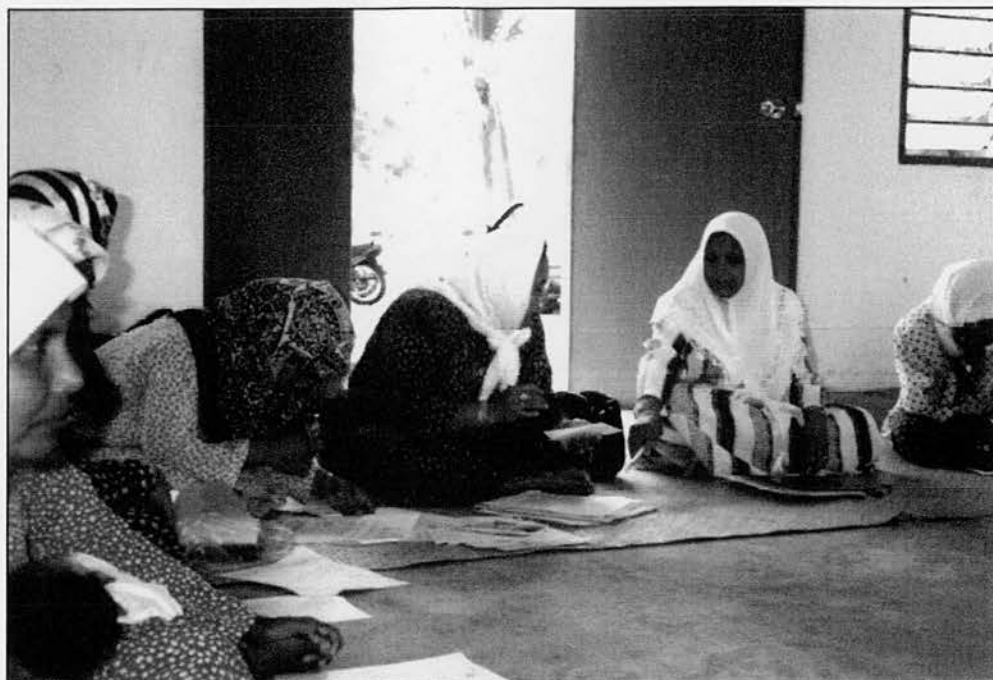


Plate 21: *Branch meeting* – WI members in a branch meeting.



Plate 22: *WI activities* – WI members take a break from cleaning the beach area. Note the informality of the dress.



Plate 23: *Annual meeting* – WI members wait to register for the general meeting which is held at a chalet owned by the local WI president.



Plate 24: *New business* - One of WI members is busy serving customers at her food stall.

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